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# NEW THEOLOGY SERMONS



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TORONTO

# NEW THEOLOGY SERMONS

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

MOST of the sermons contained in this volume have been preached from the City Temple pulpit during the last twelve months. Some of them bear directly upon the New Theology controversy which broke out early in January of the present year. They contain little or nothing of a directly controversial character, but they may be of interest to the general reader as a practical demonstration of the way in which the principles of the New Theology, as expounded by the present writer, find a homiletic application. It is sometimes contended by its critics that the New Theology is not a gospel. There is no other gospel: the New Theology is Christianity stripped of its mischievous dogmatic accretions. That it is able to make its appeal to conscience and heart as well as to the intellect is surely demonstrable from the fact that it can be preached, and that people are moved to purer and nobler living by means of it. Wherever and whenever the preaching of any other kind of theology succeeds in doing this it is because it applies the principles of the New Theology without knowing it. The name matters little, and perhaps it is to be regretted that it was ever used; the thing itself is as old as Christianity.

It is frequently pointed out by assailants of the New Theology that its adherents do not agree in their presentation of it. Do adherents of older theologies agree? It is a patent fact that they do not, and it is also a patent fact that they are all a wretched failure: the world is gradually ceasing to take notice of them, and they have almost no influence upon either science or literature, not to speak of social and political life. Whether the New Theology will have a different tale to tell remains to be seen; already there are some indications that it will.

But are the differences in the statement of the New Theology so very marked? To the present writer it would not matter if they were, for all he cares to do is to deliver his own message, and leave the effect to the test of time. But it is not true that such differences exist. There is no fundamental divergence, except perhaps in regard to the philosophy which underlies the theology; other differences are trifling. There is general agreement in all the main positions, such as the person of Christ, the Atonement, the authority of Scripture, and the mission of the Church. It is perhaps to be expected that some of the preachers of the New Theology should be rather more timid and cautious in their departure from conventional positions than others; but there can be no standing still — they must either go on or go back.

One great question on which divergence seems to exist is that of sin. In regard to that question the



present writer has nothing either to modify or withdraw. He believes that the false emphasis which for ages has been placed upon the fact of sin in the relations of the soul and God has been harmful, and has tended to divert attention from the true work of the Church — the realisation of the Kingdom of God — and also to make men morbidly self-conscious. There is no sin against God which is not a sin against man; there is no form of wrongdoing which does not find a social expression. This is true even of secret sin, for anything that tends to the injury of one's own moral nature injures society in the long run. It seems to be perfectly easy to use exaggerated language about sin and yet to live a thoroughly selfish life. The sooner we get back to a healthy realism in our estimate of wrongdoing the better. It ought to be self-evident that sin has never injured God except through man, and that the moral value of a man's life is to be measured by its effect upon the common life of humanity. All the dogmatic considerations which have been woven around this subject are either useless or untrue, mostly the latter. It has occupied in Christian thought a place altogether disproportionate to its true worth.

It cannot be too clearly emphasised that the other-worldism of so-called orthodox Christianity has in reality nothing to do with Christianity. This is a thing which the average church-goer apparently finds it difficult to understand, and yet it is beyond all question that the Church of Jesus originally knew of

no commission to get men ready for a heaven beyond the tomb. In so far as the Church attempts to do that now, she is doing something which found no place in apostolic preaching. The Church exists to witness for the Kingdom of God, and for nothing else. If she were true to her Master's mind she could have no truce with a social order in which the weak have to go to the wall and cruelty and oppression are inevitable. She ought not to be patching up the present social fabric, but labouring to replace it by a better. The social work which is being done by the Churches at present is no doubt of great value in brightening the lives of the poor and giving them a helping hand, but for the most part it does not go to the root of the matter: our whole industrial life to-day is based upon a principle which is fundamentally anti-Christian, and the Church of Jesus ought to wage open war upon it until it is gone for ever. Co-operation must replace competition; brotherhood must replace individualism; the weakest (morally and physically) must be the objects of the tenderest care which the community can show; selfishness must be driven out by love. This is the whole Christian programme; nothing less than this represents the mind of Jesus, and nothing other than this ought ever to have been preached in His name. It is quite simple and clear, and yet it is plain to all the world that the Church has somehow got so far away from it that the masses of the people have ceased to understand that she ever held it. They identify

Christianity with church buildings, psalm-singing, christenings, penitent forms, and such like; they never dream that these things belong to a circle of ideas which are not distinctively Christian at all. True, the Christians of the first century held some mistaken beliefs as to the manner in which the kingdom of love should come, but the main thing to be noted is that they expected it here on this earth.

This does not mean that the Christian should ignore belief in a life to come, and concentrate only upon the task of bettering this world for the sake of generations yet unborn: it means the substitution of a true for a false other-worldism. The conventional eschatology of the Churches is both incoherent and untrue. It is so because in reality it takes for granted a view of the structure of the universe which no one believes or can believe to-day, and tries to square this view with the facts of life as we know it — a perfectly hopeless task. The capacity of the human mind for entertaining contradictions is considerable, but the contradictions of popular Christian eschatology are too patent to be altogether ignored. Thus we have belief in a physical resurrection and a distant judgment day side by side with belief in the present bliss of the righteous and punishment of the damned. Then, too, we have the remarkable silence of the pulpit in regard to eternal (in the sense of everlasting) punishment: the bald, unvarnished doctrine shocks the moral sense, so it is usually avoided. Some preachers go the length of boldly giving it up,

while continuing to preach the necessity of believing in the "finished work" of Christ if salvation is to be secured. Comparatively few seem to see that the moment this doctrine is eliminated from the conventional dogmatic system of ideas the whole fabric falls to the ground. Salvation still seems to be thought of as primarily individualistic, and to consist in getting into heaven. By far the weakest point in connection with it all is the absence of a clear and reasonable explanation of what is meant by the doctrine of Atonement. The majority of preachers still go on assuming or declaring that Jesus by His death on Calvary obtained salvation for mankind, but they never say how He did it, for they do not know, and most of them content themselves with proclaiming what they call the fact without pretending to give any explanation. Is it not about time that all this fumbling ceased, and preachers showed themselves able to give a reason for the faith that is in them? Is it not clear even to the prejudiced mind that conventional Christian belief in the "Last Things" rests upon a geocentric view of the universe which has long since passed away? Is it not equally clear that the conventional doctrine of Atonement is derived from certain New Testament ideas which have no place in the teaching of Jesus Himself? But for the bondage of the letter of Scripture there would be no need to demonstrate the futility of the so-called orthodox way of preaching the doctrine of Atonement.

What we have now to make plain to the world is that as Christianity is the gospel of the Kingdom of God — that is, the glad tidings of the reign of love — salvation must consist in ceasing to be selfish and being filled instead with the spirit of Christ. The reason for trying to establish the Kingdom of God here is that humanity is one and immortal, and must make a beginning somewhere if it is to fulfil its destiny in accordance with the will of God. There is no absolute dividing line between the hither and the yonder; life also is one, and if a man leaves this world ignorant and debased, ignorant and debased he will begin on the farther side of death. The object of the Christian evangel is to turn every selfish being into a loving being, every sinner into a saviour, in order that the Kingdom of God may be fully realised. There is no such thing as an individual salvation and no such thing as a lonely or hopeless hell: salvation implies the living of the individual life in terms of the whole, and hell is divine love reclaiming its own. Atonement is love at work, sharing to the full in the disabilities wrought by selfishness, that it may break down all the barriers that selfishness has erected between man and man, and man and God.

This is the gospel we have to preach, and it centres in Jesus, because Jesus not only taught but lived it. "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."



# NEW THEOLOGY SERMONS

## GAIN OF LIFE

“To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”—PHIL. i. 21.

AMONGST apostolic utterances this one stands out as a definite affirmation of the solidarity of the life that now is with that which is to come. The spiritually-minded man, it tells us, has nothing to fear from death, for it can only mean the deepening of the content of his present experience of life. It will be the enlargement of his consciousness of capacity for God. It will not be an entirely new experience of truth; it will rather be the fruitage of the experience he now possesses. Let us try to understand something of this with St. Paul to guide us. Our text falls naturally into two parts, which are both necessary to an adequate realisation of the apostle's meaning. It is one of those Scriptural statements which can be considered apart from their context — and there are not many of them. Indeed, it might be said that the two halves of our text could stand separately, and yet each make good, clear sense. Unfortunately, however, the former, “To me to live is Christ,” is often dwelt upon to the exclusion

of the latter. I am sure you hear it a good deal oftener than you hear the second part of our text, "To die is gain," which is sometimes read as though there were no close connection between the two; and yet it is unquestionable that in the mind of the apostle the two assertions are cognate aspects of the same spiritual truth. It should not be difficult to discover what that truth is. The best way, probably, to deal with the question that it raises would be to inquire, first, what St. Paul means to convey to the minds of his readers by the expression, "To me to live is Christ," and secondly, how much is implied in the complementary assertion that "to die is gain."

"To me to live is Christ." The expression is a somewhat mystical one. That is, it indicates a truth too great for ordinary language or for exact statement. It bears a certain resemblance to other Pauline utterances, such as, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Or, "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me." Again, "Christ in you the hope of glory." These are characteristic Pauline expressions, but they can be paralleled in other parts of the New Testament, especially the Johannine writings, where they appear with some slight variation in form. For example, "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him." "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more



can ye, except ye abide in Me.” Here our Lord Himself is represented as speaking. But in the first Epistle of St. John, chapter v., verse 12, much the same thing is stated — “He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” The likeness between these various statements is at once obvious, even though the thoughts for which they severally stand are not quite the same. But there is a foundation truth, a fact of spiritual experience, common to them all. It is that of the mystical union between the Christ, the Eternal Son, and the soul of the Christian believer. Plainly enough, too, not only St. Paul, but the writer of the fourth gospel and of the Johannine epistles, identifies this Christ or Eternal Son in some way with Jesus of Nazareth.

It is usually taken for granted by readers of the New Testament that, in all St. Paul’s burning words about the Christ whom he evidently loved with such passionate devotion, he is speaking of Him in terms of the actual Jesus of Galilee; but this statement ought not to be made without the most careful qualification. There is no evidence that St. Paul ever saw Jesus in the flesh. He only saw Him in his ecstatic vision on the road to Damascus. He never refers to the details of Jesus’ early life. They seem to have possessed only a secondary interest for him. Almost the only allusions he makes to them are in the passages about the institution of the Lord’s Supper and the attestation of the Resurrection. Take the

former — “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is My body.” The second, the one concerning the Resurrection, is this — “First He was seen of Cephas, then of the Twelve, then of about five hundred brethren at once. . . . Last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time.” These are almost the only references that St. Paul makes to the earthly life of Jesus. He never says a word about the actual human life, with its joys and sorrows, successes and failures, victories and defeats. He says nothing about the Jesus who gathered the multitudes around Him upon the hillsides of Galilee; nothing about the Jesus who wept over Jerusalem; the Jesus who called the little children unto Him, saying to those who would have kept them away, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven”; nothing about the Jesus who was a welcome guest in the home of Mary and Martha. Now, remember that St. Paul wrote his letters before a word of the gospels was written. This omission therefore to make any direct sympathetic reference to the earthly life of Jesus is remarkable, especially when we remember that St. Paul did more than any other apostle to make Christianity a world-religion, and that his personal devotion to his Lord was so com-

plete and all-absorbing. What is the explanation of his silence? Well, it seems to me to be as follows: St. Paul's mind was dominated by one great thought, a thought which related him rather to the risen and exalted Jesus than to the Jesus of the days of His flesh. St. Paul knew that he was living his life in vital relationship to the Divine Man of pre-Christian thought and experience. Now I want you to listen very carefully to this. It is very important that we should understand just who or what this Divine Man was held to be, not only by St. Paul but by St. Paul's teachers and forerunners. You can hardly imagine that Paul came fresh to his work of witnessing Christ in the world with no ideas to declare except those which he obtained direct from heaven at the time when he was called to be an apostle. By the Divine Man, then, was meant that side or expression of the being of God from which the finite universe and all mankind have come forth. The idea in the mind of these old thinkers from whom St. Paul learned this truth was that the being of God, though infinitely complex, and having a myriad aspects of which we can know nothing, is in one of those aspects the source of humanity as distinct from all else. Whatever else he may be, God is eternally man. He is all that we mean by ideal manhood, and infinitely more. There is therefore eternally in the heart of God a fontal or archetypal Man to whom we all belong and whose life is the light of men. I think this is a glorious

idea, and irresistibly true. It must be true. St. Paul did not invent it, as we see from its independent expression in the fourth gospel. It sprang from the union of Greek thought with Hebrew religion. It does not seem to be generally recognised that Paul almost certainly owed a great deal to Greek teaching as well as to Jewish Rabbis. He seems to have been rather proud of the fact that he was a citizen of no mean city, the Greek city of Tarsus, and numerous references in his writings prove that he was well acquainted with Greek literature. I think if I were to take out of St. Paul's Epistles every citation from a Greek master it would occasion some of you a certain amount of surprise to realise the extent of his indebtedness to Greek thinkers no less than to his own Jewish teachers. For centuries before the Roman conquest of Asia Minor Palestine had formed part of the Syro-Greek dominion of the Ptolemies, and it was at one time a question whether Jewish civilisation, and even Jewish religion, would not be permanently assimilated to Greek models. It was to prevent that, in fact, that a century and a half before Jesus was born the great national insurrection of the Maccabees took place. At this very moment, too, a great Græco-Jewish intellectual centre had grown up in the city of Alexandria, where one of the most eminent of ancient thinkers, Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, taught a doctrine in which something like the theory of the Divine Man was worked out and made the keystone of the system.

There was, too, in existence at this time a vast apocalyptic literature, only one perfect specimen of which has come down to us — I mean the Book of Daniel. This book seems to have been written either immediately before or during the Maccabean insurrection, to hearten the people of Israel against their oppressors. There is one remarkable allusion in that book to the contemporary belief in the existence of the archetypal Divine Man — you know the passage I mean. It is that wherein we are told that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast into the burning fiery furnace because they refused to worship the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. The whole story is, of course, figurative, parabolic, but it is told with intense dramatic power. The tyrant inquires, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? . . . Behold, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like a son of God.” Here is a distinct allusion to this Græco-Jewish conception of the Divine Man, who is author and architect of all that is in this wonderful universe of ours. I say that St. Paul was no stranger to this idea, which, indeed, colours all his thinking. It lends him inspiration for his great and noble work, for to him the Divine Man was Jesus, or perhaps it would be better to say that the one perfect incarnation of the Divine Man on earth was Jesus. St. Paul regarded this as the greatest discovery of his life. He never

tried to smooth away all the inconsistencies or obscurities of his mode of presenting this truth to his converts. He took it for granted. He preached it in season and out of season. For him it was enough that Jesus, the very Jesus who had lived in Galilee and been crucified in Jerusalem, was the Divine Man from heaven. He says so with perfect clearness. There is nothing equivocal about his language in this regard. Into the question as to whether that Divine Man who is the source of all creation and of every human life could become completely incarnate in any one human being he does not enter. He seems to take for granted that, in so far as one human life could reveal the eternal Divine Man, Jesus did it. Nor does he mean that Jesus was merely the vehicle or the tabernacle of that heavenly manhood. To St. Paul, Jesus was the Divine Man himself, the Divine Man self-limited, but none the less the very source and soul of the ideal. "He emptied Himself," he tells us, "taking upon Him the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man; He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." There is no mistaking

St. Paul's meaning in the use of such words as these.

From this root principle St. Paul derives his whole gospel. Henceforth he relates everything to the Divine Man, the risen and exalted Jesus. He is possessed by the thought. He loves the risen Lord with his whole soul. He thinks of Jesus no longer after the flesh, no longer as the Carpenter of Nazareth, but as the great creative ideal, the fontal personality who was before all ages and in whom all things consist. It is with this ideal Christ that the Epistles are mainly concerned, not with the Jesus of Galilee. Indeed, he warns us against dwelling upon the latter thought too much. "Henceforth we know no man after the flesh. Yea, though we have known Christ Himself after the flesh, yet now henceforth we know Him so no more." The life that Jesus lived, he maintained, is the life that we ought all to seek to live. It is the life that God has meant for us; that is, we too ought to manifest the Divine Man. We already belong to Him, but to realise that fact and to live in the spirit of it is to escape from the bondage of sin and dread, and to live the life that is eternal. This is what this great man means by the saying, "To me to live is Christ." He means that the true life for any man to live is the life that manifests the divine manhood from which we came forth and unto which, by the victory of redeeming love, we shall return.

It should not be overlooked, however, that there

is an intense personal experience here. The Apostle is not merely engrossed with an impersonal ideal. He *knows* his Lord, knows Him for himself, knows Him, as it were, face to face and heart to heart; and he is possessed by the conviction that he and his master are one in a union so close that the lesser is lost and fulfilled in the greater. It is difficult to find an analogy for this spiritual experience. Perhaps the nearest we can come to it is that of the father who lives his life again in the career of his boy, or the woman whose whole existence is bound up with that of her lover, or the soldier or the clansman of olden days whose body and soul were willingly yielded to the service of his chief, a service in which all the value of life was summed up for him. You know it is possible for one personality to fulfil itself, as it were, in ministering to and in living again in the career of another. This is what St. Paul did, and the sentence, "To me to live is Christ," is the expression of it.

Nor has Paul been alone in this feeling for the glorified Jesus. Many of the best and noblest of our race have felt it and declared it. Some of you who are listening to me in this congregation to-night know it for yourselves. You could say, like St. Paul, "To me to live is Christ"—like Bernard of Clairvaux,

Jesus, my only joy be Thou,  
As Thou my prize wilt be;  
Jesus, be Thou my glory now,  
And through eternity.



I want you all to feel — those of you who can say that, and those of you who cannot — that at any rate it represents an experience deep and real. It was the dominant experience, it was the central truth of the Gospel preached by the first Christians. This then is the truth declared in the former part of our text — “To me to live is Christ.”

What about the second — “To die is gain”? Now, unless I am greatly mistaken, there is something suggested here which very few people believe nowadays, more especially those who profess and call themselves Christians. For what does your average Christian think about death? First, he is afraid of it — that is, until the hour of death actually arrives, but then, as I have been told, most people cease to be afraid. In the ordinary swirl of life your Christian is afraid of death. He may sing hymns about it, and make pious references to it, but he does not want to die — not he. Perhaps this is to some extent a merciful provision of Divine Providence to secure that we shall pay proper attention to the value of the present.

Morbid other-worldliness is unhealthy, but morbid fear of death should be considered equally so. There would be no such fear if men could be induced to live their lives in the spirit of the principle of St. Paul. What that principle is we have already seen. Further, your average Christian regards death as the winding up of everything. It spells finality. At the moment of death the destiny is

fixed. He does not tell you why it should be so. He thinks he believes that it is so. The Roman Catholic believes in a purgatory of greater or less duration for all the imperfect people who pass through the great change, excepting those who die in mortal sin. For these he holds there is no hope; throughout eternity they must continue to endure unspeakable agony and be banished from the presence of God. The conventional Protestant belief is even worse, however it may be toned down or disguised. It is that at the moment of death the destiny of the soul is fixed for weal or woe eternally. Certain exceptional teachers speak, indeed, of what they call "the larger hope," or "the second opportunity" for accepting divine grace, and so on and so forth. The majority of preachers believe in some such relief to the horror of wholesale damnation, but they are careful not to say so, because they imagine that to assert it would weaken the Gospel appeal. What they do not seem to see is that the only Gospel appeal which has ever had real spiritual power is the appeal from which all such considerations are excluded. To believe in everlasting damnation or even in the "larger hope" is to show that you have never understood the Gospel and do not even understand what hell is. You have a wrong view of the meaning both of life and death. Do you think that St. Paul held such a view? I am perfectly sure he did not, great as his intellectual limitations may have been in other respects. For

instance, St. Paul seems to have believed in the visible second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. He thought He would come in his own lifetime. At the beginning of his ministry he brings this belief into every one of his discourses. But in the letter, part of which we have read together to-night, and whence our text is taken, a writing which represents the mature thought of Paul the aged, waiting in prison for his martyrdom, you see a change of view. The Apostle no longer dwells upon the thought that Jesus is coming again upon the clouds of heaven, and that suddenly and cataclysmically the kingdom of God shall be established upon earth and the enemies of truth destroyed. Not so. Instead of that he says gently and sweetly, "I long to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." You see there is an evident change in the Apostle's outlook, which shows that there had been a limitation of view at the beginning of his ministry. But it is not so here. Nowhere in the writings of St. Paul from first to last can we find anything that answers to the conventional Catholic or Protestant view of the destiny of the soul after death. What, then, did St. Paul think about death and the life that lies beyond? Well, I think I can tell you. It all follows from what he thought about Christ. To him life consisted in manifesting Christ the Divine Man. This was to him a soul-absorbing passion, governing and transforming every activity of his nature. It was the sum of his interests, his all-

inclusive joy. Hence he would say with fervent sincerity, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is — more Christ."

I want to show you before I close what a flood of light this sheds upon the life beyond the tomb. Let me tell you my own conviction about this Pauline thought. I believe we are living now at the heart of things, only we do not realise it. The being of God is a circle with its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere. Everywhere is here. Everywhen is now. Life is not a matter of hither and yonder, but of higher and lower. We are here to manifest, against the dark background of limitation, the nature of the Divine Man. There is no other way of manifesting Him. To manifest Christ perfectly in a world that had never known pain or struggle would be impossible. One Paul is worth ten thousand seraphs as an expression of the innermost of God. Just in proportion as we can do this we prepare our next world.

The tissues of the life to be  
We weave with colours all our own,  
And in the field of destiny  
We reap as we have sown.

Every loving thought and deed knits us in closer and ever closer fellowship to the eternal truth. Conversely, every selfish, material desire blinds us to that truth. Every act of sin prepares its own hell, and there can be no escaping it, for God is not mocked.

I sent my soul through the Invisible,  
Some letter of that After-life to spell;  
And by-and-by my Soul returned to me,  
And whispered, I myself am Heaven and Hell.

Faith in Christ is faith in love, the love of man wedded to the love of God. Nothing in the long run can prevail against that love in this world or the next. It makes hell; it *is* heaven. I believe that the mere crossing of the mysterious gulf called physical death matters very little. It only means a change of lights. The wicked man finds that he has been living by false values, and the good man finds how much more has yet to be learned and how many richer depths of the divine nature are yet to be plumbed. One thing we shall all find, and that is that the truest life is the life that Jesus lived. That is the eternal life, whether here or beyond, this side or the farther side of the tomb. Live it we must by the redeeming power of God. We shall make our bed in pain until we do; and, the nearer a man approaches to the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus, the more he will yearn over the failure of the lost, the more he will long to lift up and heal and save. How can Christhood ever be content with anything less? In the presence of sin and suffering, here or on the farther side of death, what do you suppose the love of Christ is doing? What can it be doing but identifying itself with the lot of the sinner and laying itself alongside every darksome experience until it has transformed it into light and

love? The love of Christ must be making war against sin until He had subdued all things unto Himself. "For He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." This is the faith of St. Paul, in the power of which he lived and died. Thus it is that to the spiritual man to die is gain. It is the shattering of limitations, the opening of the prison to them that are bound, the discovery of new faculties, new powers, wider and deeper experience of God; it is more Christ. "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Think when our one soul understands  
The great word that makes all things new,  
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,  
How will the change strike me and you,  
In the house not made with hands?  
Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,  
Your heart anticipate my heart,  
You must be just before in fine,  
See and make me see for your part  
New depths of the divine.

## THE RISEN CHRIST

He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.  
Come see the place where the Lord lay.—  
MATT. xxviii. 6.

THE question of the resurrection of Jesus is one which does not easily lend itself to dispassionate discussion, for so many important issues are bound up with it that few people are able to regard it with an open mind. The almost universally held opinion is that Christianity stands or falls by the belief that its Founder actually rose from the dead. This is not quite the case, but it is so nearly the case that few will be inclined to dispute it. Still, a better and more accurate way of describing the situation would be to say that Christianity stands or falls by faith in the *risen Christ*, and that as a historical religion it started with a belief that its Founder had revealed Himself to His disciples after the world believed Him to be dead. This belief had far-reaching consequences, for it demonstrated the truth that wickedness cannot kill anything which is really of God, and that love is in the end victorious over hate. This way of stating the case is one which not only answers to the facts, but would hold good under any theory as to the circumstances attending

the resurrection of Jesus. What I now wish to do is to set before you what I take to be its everyday spiritual value.

The words of our text are, taken literally, not quite consistent with the account given in the other gospels. Indeed, it will be no news to you that there is no subject indicated in the New Testament on which the various accounts are so conflicting; but it is a curious thing that so few people seem able to read them critically and get beneath the various discrepancies to the salient and unassailable fact with which they are concerned. It is impossible to reconcile the various gospel accounts of the details of the resurrection and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus; but one thing is unescapable, namely, that if the primitive Christians had not been absolutely certain that they had seen Jesus alive after His crucifixion and burial, they would never have dared to preach Him to the world. This belief made all the difference to their feelings and conduct. For an expression as to what they really felt about the matter we have something earlier even than the gospels, namely, the words of St. Paul as contained in 1 Cor. xv. These show beyond all possibility of doubt that primitive Christian belief centred on the conviction that Jesus was alive and reigning in the world unseen, and that presently He would return to establish His dominion over the kingdoms of the earth. Surely if there is one fact well authenticated in history, it is this belief in the risen Jesus.



But the modern mind balks at the suggestion of an empty tomb, and this suggestion is with most intelligent people held to be the chief difficulty in considering the question to-day. I cannot now pause to examine the evidence with any pretence to thoroughness, but I would point out that in my judgment it is impossible to escape the conclusion that the primitive Christians did believe in the empty tomb *simply because they had no conception of an existence apart from the body*. I do not think many of you have really grasped this fact. You are inclined to take for granted that our present-day view of the structure of the universe, and the separation of the spirit from the body, is precisely the same as that of the ancient world; but it is not. The modern Western mind tends to draw a hard and fast distinction between matter and spirit which did not exist in the minds of the writers of the New Testament. Let me show you what I mean, for I think you may find it somewhat interesting.

I dare say you all know that the ancient civilised world was rather small. Leaving out the Far East, which had a civilisation of its own, and was hardly known to the West, we may say that the whole world of thought and action as known to the men of the New Testament lay around the Mediterranean Sea. Now try to picture the way in which the people of that day must have thought about the universe. Remember, they knew nothing about the vast interstellar systems in which our earth is only as a speck

of dust. To them heaven was quite near, just above the sky; and they did not think of the sky as being much farther away than an arrow could shoot. It is difficult now for us to realise this, but so it was. They thought of heaven as a bright and glorious abode, a mile or two up above the surface of the earth, with everything in it just as real and concrete as things are down here. To pass from one world to the other did not mean laying aside the body; it was simply a transition from one place to another, of much the same kind as getting into a ship and going to America would be to us to-day. I do not mean that all men were supposed to go up into heaven in this way, but it was believed that some had done so, such as Enoch and Elijah. But, whether men went up or not, it was believed that heavenly messengers came down, and the bodies of these heavenly messengers were supposed to be just as real as ours, only finer. They did not behave like ghosts. When they disappeared they just went back into heaven in the same matter-of-fact way that we shall all presently rise from our places here in church and go home. I do not wish you to understand that this is what all the philosophers thought, as well as the common people, concerning the structure of the universe and the relation of matter and spirit; but, broadly speaking, it is what the men of the New Testament thought, and I am not prepared to say that they were wholly wrong. I think perhaps our modern tendency to drive a wedge between

matter and spirit is wider of the mark than theirs. Our universe is bigger than theirs, thanks to the telescope, and that is the most that we can say.

But what I want you now to see is that such a view of the universe naturally made the primitive Christians attach great importance to the idea of a physical resurrection. They believed that when men died their souls went down into Hades instead of up into heaven, and that these souls were helpless until they got back into the body again; they could hardly be said to be alive at all apart from the body. The kind of heaven to which they looked forward, therefore, was the restoration of the soul to the body. The body had then to become glorified — that is, made beautiful — and endowed with immortality, like the angels in heaven. Examine Paul's words closely, for instance, and you will find this view explicitly stated or implied all the way through. What the Galilean disciples of Jesus expected Him to do before He was crucified was to bring about an ideal existence on earth. Apparently they thought that when this ideal existence came no one would have to die any more. When He died Himself — and such a bloody and dreadful death too — they were thoroughly overwhelmed with despair. Nothing could have seemed a more complete reversal of their hopes. But when they heard that He had risen again, those hopes not only returned with greater intensity, but became certainties. It is no use discussing whether they believed in the empty

tomb or not. From what I have already said it will, I trust, be clear that they had to believe in the empty tomb. They never thought of any other kind of resurrection, for they never thought of Jesus as having any other body than the body in which He was crucified. He might take that body up into heaven, but, according to their belief, He could not be found apart from it outside of Hades. Their view of the whole matter was as simple and child-like as their belief in the nearness of a material heaven just above the sky. When Jesus went away from them again they believed He had taken that very body up into heaven, where it was glorified with unearthly beauty, and that presently He would come back again with great power and splendour to make a similar heaven on earth. You can see from this why they talked so little about going to heaven themselves, and what they meant by heaven coming down. There is no more beautiful passage in the whole of sacred literature than the beginning of Revelation xxi. The reference to death in this passage means exactly what it says. The Christians expected that when Jesus came again on the clouds of heaven He would come to call them all from their graves to reign with Him for ever in glorified bodies on earth. Belief in His resurrection was therefore the starting-point of their faith. What He had done they would do through His power. Whatever theory of the resurrection of Jesus we may hold to-day, it is quite clear that the words of our text meant orig-

inally exactly what they said: "He is not here, for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Whatever else these first Christians believed, they unquestionably believed in the empty tomb, and their whole theory of the nature of the universe was the principal cause of their doing so. But let me state here with perfect frankness that I feel convinced they must have had some further cause for doing so. They really must have seen Jesus. I do not care in what way you try to account for their belief. You may hold that they saw a spirit, or that they were subject to hallucination, but it is hardly possible for any one to deny that these simple men and women were firmly convinced that they had seen Jesus Himself. Now it is unreasonable to suppose that any great moral movement, accompanied by such exaltation of feeling, such spiritual enthusiasm and unselfishness of purpose, as Christianity undoubtedly was, could have started from a delusion. You may believe that the dust of Jesus still lies in some underground, rock-hewn cavern outside Jerusalem:

And on His grave with shining eyes  
The Syrian stars look down;

but you cannot get away from the fact that some overpowering revolution must have taken place in order to give the first momentum to the great moral uplift which the Christian religion has since produced in the world. I have before now given what

I think to be the most reasonable explanation of the facts, and I need not repeat it here; but, whether that explanation be the true one or not, it is as certain as anything can be that the humble heroes who first proclaimed the gospel of Jesus to mankind were justified in declaring that they had received their commission from His own lips after cruel priests and ignorant fanatics believed that they had silenced Him for ever. I believe they were right. Nothing less can explain what they did then, or what the name of Jesus is still doing even now.

But there is something more to be said than even this. You can see for yourselves that the resurrection of the body of Jesus is only an external fact, and that the whole theory of the universe with which the first Christians started their preaching has had to give way to a larger; but the spiritual experience of the men who first preached Jesus was an experience of the risen Christ which holds good now, and is the very life-blood of our relationship to the eternal truth. It was the rising of Christ in a few simple Galilean fishermen that made the best in modern civilisation possible, and it is the rising of that same Christ in brave and faithful men and women now which is filling the world with a great hope for the dawning of a better day. By the word Christ, as you know, I mean not only Jesus but the spirit of Jesus, the true or ideal humanity in every human soul. You cannot believe too strongly in the rising of that Christ in the human heart to-day. I think

every true man must believe it, whether he pauses to give it doctrinal form or not. It is "the one central hope for our poor wayward race." What the world needs in order to be delivered from all the things that are holding it in bondage is the resurrection of Christ in every man. We believe to-day essentially what the first Christians believed about the need for the City of God, the heaven on earth. We want exactly the same thing as they wanted, although history has now taught us that it will not come like a thunderclap. We know that the only way in which it can come is by making every man a Christ. Let Christ rise in victory over all the forces of harm and hate, and this world would be heaven, for heaven is only the perfect expression of eternal love. Is it not beautifully simple? And can you not feel that it is grandly true? Jesus lived and died for it, and those who love and believe in Him must go on doing the same until the world is filled with all the fullness of God.

It is not much use speculating as to what the final result will be when that day comes, but the question is at least worth asking. I dare say many people wonder what the end of the world will be when every enemy has been destroyed except death. Try to picture such a world, and to believe that it is certain to come. Think of a world with no poverty in it; no war, either between nation and nation, or between man and man; no ill-will; no deceit; no selfishness; no desire to cause pain. Just imagine a world with

all the things taken out of it that made you fret and worry yesterday or will make people sad and weary to-morrow. Try to realise a world in which no one would ever seek to get the better of any one else, but in which every one would do the best he could for all, and the weakest would receive the tenderest and most considerate treatment from the rest. Why, such a world would be heaven itself save for one thing. There would only be one kind of sorrow left, and that would be the sorrow caused by the death of our loved ones. Shall we ever get free from that? Yes, I think we shall. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." I believe the early Christians were so far right that their belief in the glorified body represents a truth which the world will some day come to see to be a fact. I believe the day will come when men will recognise the universe to be wholly spiritual. The veil which separates seen from unseen will be taken away, and mortality shall be swallowed up of life. At present this is so remote that it is not much use dwelling upon it, but I have little doubt it is the truth. As soon as this world has become the expression of perfect and eternal love the so-called material will melt into the spiritual, and death will be no more. This New Testament idea is based upon a perception which I feel must be the fundamental truth about the universe of God.

Now let me try to show you the way in which you and I stand related to this truth. Remember that



the one great thing demonstrated by the resurrection of Jesus was that evil has no power to harm a child of God. It may make him suffer for a little while, but it can do nothing to diminish the moral power of his life. In so far as your life is a manifestation of the spirit of Christ it will rise triumphant over cross and tomb. I want you to recognise that this experience is not merely like something in the experience of Jesus, it is a part of it. In our text an angel of light is represented as saying to a sorrowing woman: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay, and you will find He is not there now; nothing earthly has power to keep Him there." Now if you will look at the life of any noble man, you will see a manifestation of exactly the same principle, the rising of the Christ from the tomb in which ignorance and wickedness have thought He was buried for ever. Take a case in point. John Huss was granted a safe conduct to the Council of Constance, and was there basely arrested and put to death. Those who did this wicked thing attempted to justify themselves on the ground that no faith ought to be kept with a heretic. The lie seemed triumphant for the moment; the spirit of hell prevailed for a brief hour; the poor tortured body of John Huss did not rise again. But something rose; and I think you can all tell me what it was. It was the spirit of the truth that works by love, the spirit of Christ magnified in His suffering servant. If history had not produced such men as Huss, we

should still be in the dark ages. You must not imagine that things come right by a sort of magic, automatically as it were. No, no; every moral advance has to be paid for in agony and bloody sweat; Christ is crucified before He can rise in power. Somehow I do not wish to have it otherwise, and pity seems out of place when we think of men like John Huss to whom the world owes so great a debt. For in reality these are the strong ones of the earth, and their murderers are the weak. From the higher side of the great change called death such as these can look down on their own achievements, and praise God for the privilege of being called to bear a part in the work of redeeming mankind from the power of ignorance and sin. They can mark the place where they were laid in ignominy and seeming failure; but they are not there now — they have risen. Yes, they have risen even on earth, for all they once stood for has triumphed now, and Christ is glorified in them. Let me put it to you thus? Would you not rather be John Huss than president of the council that condemned him? President and council belong to the midnight of the past; Huss is a son of the morning.

Take this lesson home to your own souls, for you will have some chance of putting it into practice before the week is out. If ever any of you young men feel tempted to take the side of the strong against the weak, forbear! Things are not what they seem. Weakness in union with love and loyalty to truth is

strength, although the world may not know it for the moment. Never play the coward's part; you would never dream of doing so if you could see life as it really is. Believe me, the highest is not only the true but the strong; and you will be held to account for whatever use you make of the vision God grants you. No man is altogether without such a vision. You know quite well, from day to day and from hour to hour, what as a true man you ought to do and say. Do it, and leave the consequences to God. This is the way in which Christ comes to a needy world and strikes away its chains. There is no other way. All that God is doing for the world to-day is being done through the Christhood of His children. They may be crucified in shame and buried in failure, but no tomb can hold them long. The world can point to the place where they lay, but they are not there — they have risen. Those of you who went with me to Oxford some time ago will perhaps remember the stone cross sunk in the road opposite Balliol College. That cross marks the spot where Christ suffered in Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer, the spot where their ashes lay in ignominy. Such an execution would be impossible in England to-day. Why? Because of the triumph of that for which these men suffered death, namely, liberty of conscience. But the Christ of Cranmer is not in that stone cross; he has risen in the heart in England, in the larger sense of justice and tenderness, and susceptibility to all that makes

for nobler life and joy. "He is not here; He is risen. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

Remember this the next time you hear evil shriek in triumph over good. Never mind appearances — no, not even when you yourself are the sufferer. Nothing can hurt you unless it finds an ally within yourself. If Christ has risen in you He will rise in all you have to do for Him. As you gaze upon the tomb of buried hopes, say to yourself, "He is not there; He is risen; that is only where He was laid yesterday. To-day, to-morrow, and to all eternity He lives and reigns."

## THE RESURRECTION POWER

“Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” — ROM. i. 4.

THIS remarkable phrase, coming as it does at the beginning of St. Paul's most doctrinal epistle, is evidently meant as a statement of foundation truth. It embodies the most of what the Apostle has to write and preach about, and, rightly understood, supplies the key to his whole gospel. Before going any farther, therefore, in our examination of its meaning, let us be quite sure that we understand the terms employed in it. Almost every word and phrase in the text requires a brief examination. Let us take them seriatim. It is always important to make sure of the meaning of the terms we employ in our ordinary speech. I am afraid few people are sufficiently careful about that, and most of the confusion of thought that arises, either in religion or anything else, is due to our inability to pay cash for the terms we employ. Let us be sure that we can do it in this instance.

The first word is “declared.” This word means designated, or ordained, or shown forth. The phrase “with power” should be taken along with

it in order to complete the sense — “declared with power to be the Son of God.”

The title “Son of God” should not need much explanation, but perhaps it ought to be pointed out that among the Jews it was used as a description of the Messiah, and did not necessarily denote a divine being. In this Messianic sense Jesus was declared to be the Son of God at several special crises of His life and work, such as the Baptism, according to Matthew’s account; again, at Peter’s confession of Him; again, at the Transfiguration; and, lastly, at the Resurrection.

“According to the spirit of holiness.” This should not be taken to mean that the Holy Spirit apart from Jesus Himself declared Him to be the Son of God. It means that the spirit of holiness, plainly evident in the character of Jesus, was also the spirit of power. That is all it means. It is Jesus’ own spirit that is in question, much as we might think of the mind or spirit shown by any one of our acquaintances in the ordinary walk of life. We might remark, for instance, that the present Lord Mayor of London is showing a beautiful spirit in his care for crippled children. It is in a somewhat similar sense that the phrase “according to the spirit of holiness” is employed in our text as descriptive of Jesus.

Lastly, “By the resurrection from the dead.” This translation is not quite accurate; it ought rather to be “By the resurrection *of* the dead.”

The difference is not unimportant, for the change of preposition enlarges the meaning of the whole passage, as we shall presently see. As the text stands it seems to be a statement to the effect that the Divine Sonship of Jesus was demonstrated beyond dispute by the fact that, quickened by the Holy Spirit, He arose from the tomb in which He had been laid after His death on Calvary. That is what it seems to say on the face of it, but I think we shall see reason to believe that this is not the whole, nor even the principal part, of the truth which the Apostle seeks to convey to his readers.

Now that we are possessed of a fairly accurate apprehension of the value of the terms employed in this passage, let us proceed to scrutinise the general statement a little more closely. I think we shall find something here that bears immediately and helpfully upon our everyday concerns. To begin with, what is it that has given the name of Jesus the power over human hearts which it possesses to-day? When He was put to death on Calvary every one, friend and foe alike, seemed to have thought that there was an end of Him. Not only were they mistaken, but the very cross on which He died has become the symbol of His victory. No matter what we may think of the personality of Jesus, there is no denying these facts; the strongest Christian and the blindest atheist would agree about them. His influence is now greater than it ever was. Why so? What has made it possible? I think you

will find that our text gives us the answer in a fairly small compass. In the first place, the disciples of Jesus somehow became convinced that He was not really dead, but alive and reigning in the world unseen, interested as much as ever in the work His followers were doing, and helping them in the doing of it. I need not discuss the question of the physical resurrection. Some people think that the very existence of Christianity depends upon whether the body of Jesus rose from the tomb or not, while others are repelled by the suggestion that it did. I have previously given you my own views on the subject, and I cannot afford the time to re-discuss them now. I would merely point out that the personal followers of Jesus became absolutely convinced that they had seen their Master face to face, spoken to Him, and heard Him speak, after the world was convinced that He was both dead and buried. This conviction had immediate and important spiritual results. It gave these simple men a new and greater confidence in Jesus and in the meaning of His life than they had possessed before. They saw that that life was, after all, the strongest thing in the universe; they realised that in the end nothing could contend against it. Evil could do it no real harm, because God was behind it. Even before His crucifixion they had looked upon Jesus as the Son of God in a higher sense than that title had ever been used of any one before. But now henceforth they thought of Him in a higher way still. To them He



was declared to be the Son of God with power because of His victory over evil and death.

Try to put yourselves in their place, and you will realise better the meaning of this aspect of my text. Suppose, then, that you had known Jesus in the flesh, and that you had learned to understand a little of the moral and spiritual beauty of the life He lived; suppose that you knew just as much about Him as Peter, James, John, and the other disciples did while He was alive in the flesh; suppose that you had seen Him die in blood and shame; I think it would have taken a good deal to convince you that evil was not master. Now, suppose that after this you had absolute proof — I will not say how — that your Master, whom you had mourned as dead, was still alive, and that His spirit was with you and helping you, would it not make a very great difference in your life? You could not but feel the littleness of the power that had tried to destroy Him and thought it had done so, and you would not be afraid of it any more.

This, of course, is not the only reason for the influence of Jesus in the world, as St. Paul knew perfectly well when he wrote my text. The religion of Jesus does not depend upon physical marvels, but upon moral and spiritual values. Surely no one would maintain that the spiritual power of Christianity in the world to-day is dependent only upon belief in the empty tomb in the literal, physical sense. If it were so, then belief in prodigies of a

similar kind ought to have produced similar results, but they have not done so. For instance, there was a persistent Christian tradition in the early centuries — it may be held in some quarters now, for anything I know — that Mary the mother of Jesus rose from the grave and ascended to heaven, somewhat after the fashion of her Divine Son. A few days after she was buried, so the legend runs, the tomb was found to be empty, with only a sweet aroma to mark the sacred place where the precious body of the mother of the Lord had lain. A similar story is told about the Apostle John. And then look at the bewildering number of popular beliefs concerning the wonders wrought by the physical remains of saints and martyrs. Up to the time of the Reformation, to take only one example, pilgrimages of all sorts were made to the tomb of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. The tomb is there still, only no one troubles about it now. Readers of Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" will not need to be reminded that for centuries popular belief in the miracles wrought at the tomb of Thomas à Becket was as strong as anything could well be. That superstition is now dead, and along with it has perished the belief in the superior sanctity of the martyr himself. History has thrown a clearer light upon his character and achievements, and we recognise that this popular saint was after all an obstinate, self-willed, impossible kind of person, who must have been a perfect nuisance to poor King Henry and his Govern-

ment. The case is quite different with Jesus, just because Jesus Himself was different from such saints as these. It was *the spirit of holiness* in Jesus that proved to be the true power over the hearts and lives of His immediate followers. Can you picture to yourselves the effect which the discovery of this fact must have had over the minds of those who first realised that their Master was alive, and also that He was not only alive, but backed by the whole universe of God? "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations." To me the most valuable thing about primitive Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus is the demonstration of the truth that nothing that is of God can ever perish. However it was put into the minds of the primitive disciples of Jesus, that is the truth that really matters. The spirit of perfect unselfishness, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of nobleness, the spirit of love, the spirit of self-devotion to the ideal good, the spirit of universal brotherhood, the spirit of justice and truth in all human relations — that spirit is always sure of a triumphant resurrection, no matter how stern and terrible its Calvary may have been.

But there is a further reason still for the power of the name of Jesus over the minds of men, and that is that the resurrection here spoken of is one which is continually repeated in the experience of the sons of God. I remarked at the beginning of this sermon that the phrase in our text, "the resur-

rection *from* the dead," should read "the resurrection *of* the dead." This thought is quite characteristic of St. Paul. To him the resurrection is a rising up, an issuing forth, a going forward, rather than a coming back. He thinks that the best kind of resurrection is the uprising of the spirit of Christ in individual experience. Take any one of St. Paul's letters where he mentions the resurrection as being a power in the life of the individual Christian, and you will see that that is the meaning. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." He thinks of the spiritual resurrection as going on without ceasing in the hearts of men. He believes, therefore, that the greatest evidence of the Divine Sonship of Jesus consists in the fact that He had been the means of awakening others to the truth His life was the means of declaring. He has raised us from the sleep of selfishness and moral apathy, and quickened us with the spirit of truth and love. I think we should all agree with Paul that this is the best of all the credentials of Jesus, and the one which most entitles Him to the gratitude and reverence of mankind. He is "declared to be the Son of God with power," because His spirit, working in human experience, has been the means of raising so many of us from the dead.

But there is another sense in which these words can be explained — a sense in which they come even closer to our individual experience. I think, with-

out doing violence to the thought of St. Paul, we can discern an even deeper truth behind these words. It is that of the divine sonship of every soul of man. Now, although St. Paul is speaking primarily of Jesus, one cannot but feel that he has this further thought present to his mind; in fact, it is that which to him lends significance to the very work of Jesus. What did it matter to believe that Jesus rose from the dead unless it were going to effect something in the lives of the men and women who believed it? What would it matter that Jesus lived the life He did amongst the sons of men if it were to have no effect upon other lives than His own? The real thing that matters here, and which gives significance to the work of Jesus, is that He believed it to be possible to quicken and arouse in others the experience of sonship to God. It is therefore of that divine sonship that I wish to speak — the sonship of every soul of man.

In order to attempt to show you precisely what I mean, let me give you an illustration drawn from present-day life, given to me by one of our deacons the other day. I dare say you have all heard of the Sunday morning adult schools which are held in various parts of the country. These schools are attended for the most part by working men who desire to employ a portion of their rest day in improving their general education and in listening to addresses on subjects of intellectual or moral interest. Some time ago a man of drunken habits was led to attach

himself to the movement in the following way. One of his mates had often asked him to attend the Sunday morning adult school, but he had always scornfully refused. One Bank Holiday, however, being short of money, and happening to meet this fellow-workman, he accosted him somewhat in this wise: "Mate, I am not properly drunk yet, for I have not enough money; if you will lend me a shilling to complete the process I will come with you to the adult school next Sunday morning." His mate consented, the curious bargain was struck, and no doubt the money was spent in the way indicated by the speaker. On Sunday morning the giver of the shilling came round like a recruiting sergeant to claim the fulfilment of the promise. With some difficulty the drunkard was got out of bed and taken to the place of worship where the school was held. There he was profoundly impressed with the higher aims and ideals of his fellows, most of whom he already knew, and by whose side he worked day by day. So he determined to summon his own manhood and break free from the habit that enchained him. That was more easily said than done; but that man has since developed, I am told, into a strong character, helpful, earnest, and sincere, so much so that it would be difficult to recognise him for the same person. Few imagined that he had it in him to become the man he is to-day. What has wrought the change? Remember, this is a case of genuine conversion in the

best sense, but without any emotional accompaniments whatever, and certainly without any profession of belief in this or that doctrine or theory of salvation. And yet there has been a resurrection somehow. This man has passed from death unto life; he is a new man; where formerly he was weak, now he is strong; where formerly he was blind as to the meaning of life, now he can see. I think I can tell you what it is. First, Christ came to him in his mate, the man who lent him the shilling, and others who for a time encouraged him in his efforts after a higher and purer life, and helped him past the public-houses. My informant tells me that some of these men were accustomed to go home with their comrade night after night for a long time, just to get him past the public-house door. They never badgered or bothered him about believing or disbelieving anything; they simply told him that they felt God was with them in their efforts to rise. This was the first thing. These manly fellows came to this drunken man just as Jesus came to the world. They showed him the strong life, and they made him feel that it was possible to live it. They were sons of God in the sense declared in 1 John iii.: "Beloved, now are we sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be." But another thing had to follow: this man had to be made to feel that that same potency was in him too; he too could be a man, he too could manifest the Christ. It was not that something needed to be put into him so much

as that something needed to be drawn out of him — something that had been buried and concealed by his vicious habits. If God is with these others, he said to himself, God must be with me too. This became his act of faith, and from that act of faith everything else followed. He drew upon his hidden divine resources and became a new man: he was declared to be a son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.

I have purposely chosen the simplest example I could think of to illustrate the meaning of my text. There it is; there is no gainsaying it, and there is no magic or mystery about it. Real, living faith in Jesus becomes of necessity a driving power, faith in the possibilities of our own divine nature. As Henry Drummond once put it, all nature is on the side of the man who tries to rise. The great teacher was no doubt speaking by analogy to illustrate his view of a spiritual truth, but the analogy holds perfectly good. In one corner of my garden there is a rubbish-heap; it is away out of sight, because it is not pleasant to look at. Yet more than once in that rubbish-heap I have seen a beautiful flower spring up and bloom; some hyacinth bulb or rose tree root which has been thrown there by mistake will rise out of the midst of the decay into fresh and beautiful life. The true nature of bulb or root is proved by this resurrection. There could be no flower if there were no capacity for the flower. So



it is with the children of the All-Father in this strange, bewildering world of ours. Despair of none: God indwells all; at the worst and darkest it is still possible for the Divine sonship to arise in power.

But it should not be forgotten that this spiritual resurrection, this uprising of the Divine Son in human experience, always means a Calvary of some kind. The demonstration of Divine manhood in spirit and power means that something has to be overcome, and that in the overcoming itself is God manifested and glorified in mankind. This is true of Saviour and sinner alike. That it is true of the Saviour is shown by what the New Testament has to say about Jesus: "It hath pleased God to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." Are we, then, to understand that until Calvary was over Jesus was imperfect? Hardly that; but it is one thing to possess a beautiful nature and another thing to have that nature tested and its perfection realised and brought forth. This was what had to happen to Jesus. The winsome child of Nazareth might have remained a recluse all His life, knowing little or nothing about the great world outside, with no danger from the fierce zealots of Jerusalem or the grim cruelty of the Roman soldiers. But it was not to be; it could not be. Jesus had to come out into the open, just because He felt so strongly that what concerned mankind as a whole concerned Him in particular. That could be no perfect life which consulted its own peace and

security while the great world beyond struggled on in its blind suffering and its ignorant woe. By His very disposition Jesus was driven to express His kinship with the race, and to utter all that was within Him in the effort to hear its wants and satisfy its needs. It could not have been a perfect life which was lived in the sheltered dale; it was a perfect life which overcame in the face of the storm. In the long run this was certain to mean for Jesus a Calvary of some sort, but it also meant a greater Divine dignity and glory. The divinity that was in Him was grandly realised, and the world has come to recognise it. This is a true New Testament thought about Jesus — a thought frequently and freely expressed. Take as one example the magnificent passage in Hebrews xii.: “Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”; or take those beautiful words of St. Paul in Philippians ii.: “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” — and Jesus had reached the cross before He had reached Calvary; “wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Such statements as these show with absolute clearness that the men who wrote the New

Testament believed that Jesus Himself had acquired a dignity by means of the cross which He could not have had without it.

But this is not the whole of the matter. The spirit that saves is also the spirit that suffers, or is willing to suffer, that souls may be freed from their bondage. Without this it has no power. The spirit of holiness with power is the spirit of self-sacrifice too. It is so always and everywhere. This is the truth that underlies all the substitutionary theories of the Atonement. We belong to one another so closely that no life can rightly articulate the perfect life if it withholds itself in any degree from the common life; and wherever and whenever an individual life makes itself a free gift to the common life, some measure of suffering must follow. The common life of humanity is in bonds from which only the Christ-spirit can set it free; and wherever you see that Christ-spirit at work you see the cross willingly and cheerfully borne. This was brought home to me in a vivid and original fashion on Thursday morning last. Immediately after the service, in which I had been speaking on an aspect of this particular theme, a friend of mine, a prominent business man in the City, came into the vestry and told me the following experience of his own. He happened to be driving past that grim erection, the new Old Bailey, as it is called. Happening to glance up at the building, his attention was arrested by the colossal figure of Justice which stands there. Justice is repre-

sented, as usual, as a blindfolded female holding the even scales in one hand and in the other an uplifted sword ready to strike. "Ah," thought my friend to himself, apostrophising the figure over the gate, "you may wield your sword, Madam Justice; you may strike down and destroy the poor wretches who fight against organised society; but there are some things you cannot do after all: the scales of justice and the sword of chastisement will not save the world." A few minutes afterwards he was whirled round the corner of Ludgate Hill and came in full view of the great gold cross of St. Paul's rising high above the hurrying, toiling masses, and the sun of heaven gleaming upon it. With sudden and heartfelt emotion my friend exclaimed, "There, that is what is saving the world; not the spirit that inflicts pain, but the spirit that willingly accepts pain in order to lift up and heal and unite mankind in loving fellowship with God." My friend is a true-hearted, lovable, humble-spirited man. He had just been telling me a moment before that, although he felt the power of the wider Gospel that is being preached in the name of Jesus to-day, he felt unequal to stating it himself. When he had finished telling me of this particular incident — the contrast between the sword of the Criminal Court and the great gold cross of the Cathedral — I turned to him and said, "I do not know whether you are aware of the fact, but there is something of the poet in you." He looked amused. "Well,"

I added, "go and tell that story to your friends exactly as you have told it to me, and see whether you cannot make them understand the wider Gospel. You have got the whole thing in a nutshell. The spirit of love must show itself as a spirit of sacrifice in a needy world — that is, the spirit of holiness, and nothing less than that ever is worthy to be called holy. The spirit of holiness is, blessed be God, also the spirit of power." "Well," replied my friend, with a smile, as he passed out, "you may be right, but certainly no one has ever accused me of being a poet before." I think he is better than that: he is a saviour, a Christ man; he knows the meaning of the cross. But, my friends, do you? I think you do. I do not suppose that there are more than half a dozen theologians among my hearers, but there are men and women in the front rank of the fighting line, people who are trying hard to do something that is worth doing, something that is higher than their own self-interest. You have come in here with the smarts of yesterday's conflicts upon you, the memory of yesterday's troubles in mind and heart. Listen to what I have to say about this principle in relation to your own individual experience. You know perfectly well that St. Paul was right, and that Jesus was right, and that what Jesus stood for is that which will save the world, and nothing else ever will. Do not suffer anything or anybody to limit your understanding of this glorious truth. If you will allow it to possess and

govern your lives, it will deliver you from everything that is base and sordid in thought and word and deed; it will make you love and reverence Jesus more and more for having shown you what it means. The expression of the Spirit of Christ in you may lead you to a Calvary — perhaps to many Calvaries, one after the other; but Calvary does not matter, it is only the narrow gateway through which the soul passes into freer air and larger power; it is the prelude to the resurrection, the rising up, the issuing forth, the going forward of the Divine spirit in man. This truth will teach you more and more of the closeness of your kinship with your brethren of this world; it will show you that no noble life ever has been lived or can be lived to itself alone. It will enable you to realise that all life is one, and that the life of power and joy is the life that comes nearest even on earth to the realisation of this great truth. It will make you happier even in the humble service which is rendered at home. It will make you wiser and stronger amid the monotony and drudgery of the market-place and the business house. You will never cease to be a son of God, however humble and obscure your task may be. You can realise all the time that the life that does not fear the cross is the life that gains in power by the cross, the life that rises in victory beyond the cross — “declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection of the dead.”

## THE EVER-PRESENT CHRIST

Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. — MATT. xxviii. 20.

THIS much-quoted sentence has had, and I suppose always will have, a considerable value for Christian experience. It is the declaration of a truth upon which the very life of Christianity depends. All great religions reverence the memory of their founders and treasure their words, but Christianity does something more than this: it declares itself to be immediately dependent upon the spiritual presence of its Lord, who continues to impact Himself upon the world through His followers. If this be true, no more important truth has ever been preached. Our text is an explicit declaration of it, and it behoves us therefore to make quite sure of its meaning before appropriating its message.

You may have observed that in the marginal translation in the Revised Version of the New Testament the passage is rendered, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age." Now there are several things taken for granted in this way of putting the case, which are quite important in their way and require an examination.

I will ask you to note in the first place that Matthew's version of this promise is the only one we have in the gospel record, although no doubt it is in substance authentic. This gospel was not written until after the newly formed Church of Christ had begun to settle down into something like an organised society. Matthew's gospel has therefore been called the ecclesiastical gospel. It contains Mark's history of the doings of Jesus combined with Matthew's notes of the teaching of Jesus. But we are justified in taking for granted that by the time this book was compiled both the history and the teaching had become woven into the texture of the spiritual experience of a generation which had never seen Jesus. In our text therefore we have a statement of the spiritual experience of the followers of Jesus concerning their communion with their Master long after His visible presence had been removed. The earliest record of the farewell words of Jesus would no doubt be that contained in the last few verses of the gospel of St. Mark, which have unfortunately been lost. Some day we may find them, and if so it will be a find of considerable importance, for it may reconcile the other gospel accounts of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and the exact terms of His commission to His disciples.

But another thing to be noticed about the present form of our text is its reference to the end of the world. Most people seem to take this to mean the winding up of human affairs and the institution of



a general judgment in the world unseen. To a present-day reader this would seem to be the natural interpretation to put upon the words. But that is a mistake. The meaning is quite different. The reference is not to an actual end of the world, but to a time of fresh beginnings, a millennium of peace and blessing under the visible headship of Jesus. You can see at once that this is not exactly what Christians are thinking of now — at any rate, not in the same way as the first readers of this gospel did. Both Christians and Jews in the first century were firmly possessed by the idea that before very long God would put an end to the current dispensation, would sweep out all the evil in the world and all the causes of suffering, and would inaugurate a new age of universal prosperity and good-will. Readers of Mr. H. G. Wells's book, "In the Days of the Comet," will remember that the plot turns on the crisis caused and the quick change wrought in human affairs by an enormous filmy body enveloping the earth for a few hours. Immediately before this event men are going on just as usual, struggling, suffering, and being afraid of one another. A world-wide war is actually in progress, with all its train of attendant horrors. The comet strikes, and forthwith everybody goes to sleep for a short time, to wake up and find the world regenerated: no more fighting, no more poverty, no more anguish and heart-break, no more mutual enmity and suspicion. The old world of strife and wrong has been

re-made. This was almost precisely what the first Christians and many of their Jewish contemporaries thought about what they called, in the words of our text, "the consummation of the age." The dream differed from that of Mr. Wells in that these New Testament Christians thought the change would be preceded by a sort of Messianic assize in which all the wicked would be cut off with a strong hand and only the good left to inherit the earth. Properly speaking, then, this was not the end of the world at all: it was rather a new lease of life for it, the beginning of a period of splendour and joy which they called the kingdom of God. The Christians who first read my text were firmly persuaded that this change was just at hand, and that Jesus as the Messiah would return to earth and bring it to pass. They lived in daily expectation that this event would take place when the world's cup of iniquity was full. They were not thinking of a heaven on the farther side of death so much as a heaven on this, a heaven to be enjoyed without dying. They did not expect to have to wait long for it either. Jesus might come at any moment on the clouds of heaven. What they had to do was to go on telling men about Him and trying to get them to live a better life in preparation for the new kingdom.

Then too they thought of Jesus as being spiritually present with them in the doing of this appointed work, and the experience was very real and very beautiful, the most precious and inspiring they

had ever had. Gibbon the historian, in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," points out that the distinguishing mark of early Christianity was the fervent devotion of the Christians to their Lord and their belief in His continued presence with them as the source of all their power and the means to all their triumphs. They died for Him willingly and cheerfully, feeling sure that it would not be long before His voice would call them again from the sleep of death to partake in His victory over human wickedness and to share in His glorious reign.

This is the literal interpretation of these words, and there can be no gainsaying the fact. As centuries have passed the Christian Church has come to think of them rather differently, but this is what they mean at first. You can all see at once that this is not the way in which we ordinarily understand them now. We are not looking for a visible second coming of Jesus on the clouds of heaven. Some people say they are, but they do not allow the belief to influence their conduct in any drastic fashion: they still go on buying and selling, seeing to their banking accounts, and making a provision for old age, just as though there were no probability that these things might never be needed. Most of us are hoping to see the world become better, but we do not expect to see it made perfect in a single day. Those of us who believe in immortality may believe in some kind of a general judgment, but we certainly do not expect to see it take place on earth, followed by the solemn

inauguration of a world-wide kingdom with Jesus as its king. On the contrary, most of our hymns and our pulpit language are mainly concerned with the joy that will be ours when we see our Master face to face in a heaven beyond the tomb. No doubt we all believe that some time or other the world must come to an end; and therefore, when we think about such a passage as our text, we understand it as meaning that so long as we are here, and so long as the world endures, Jesus will be with His own, helping, encouraging, and guiding them until they pass to everlasting bliss.

It is plain, then, that what the early Church thought about these words was not precisely what we think now. But were the first Christians, then, entirely mistaken as to their meaning? Had they one kind of experience and we another? Or is there any sense in which they thought and felt the same as we do about the spiritual presence of Jesus and its value for mankind? I think that fundamentally Christian experience has always been the same. It is just the same for us as it was for the first followers of Jesus. Some time ago Mr. G. K. Chesterton delivered an address to the members of the City Temple Literary Society on "Some Delusions of Doubt," in the course of which he made at least one true remark. He said that Christian experience was so much a constant thing that any true follower of Jesus to-day would understand and be able to share in the religious outlook of any Christian of

primitive times. This is indisputably true. We have the same Lord and the same relation to Him, and we speak of Him in much the same way. How does this come about? How are we to understand the spiritual presence of Jesus, and what practical importance does it possess?

This is a region where every Christian becomes a mystic; he cannot help it. To commune with a bodiless Jesus means to commune with the fundamental reality of your own being and of every other being. You are communing with Divinity, with the Self of all selves, with the Soul of all existence. I do not know whether you who prayed to Jesus with me to-night were all aware of what you were doing and of what was implied in it, but you were engaging in an exercise which linked you to infinity and made you omnipresent. For see what we were saying, and this, remember, is what Christians have always been saying. We were saying that our own humanity is on the throne of God. True humanity it was and is, a humanity we can understand because it has lived our limited life. To talk about the love of God would be rather meaningless if the world had never known the love of Jesus. But now, the love, the very love that drove the Galilean Carpenter out into the open that He might tell about God to the toiling masses of His own day and generation, is up yonder in the heart of the Infinite, and up yonder is down here, in my heart too as well as yours. I do not mean that Jesus has become lost

in God since He laid down His suffering body, but I mean that I cannot see God anywhere without seeing the face of Jesus. This is the greatest leap that religious aspiration has ever taken. We have seen something worshipful in the homespun of a Jewish peasant, and forthwith we have recognised it as Divine and eternal. Looking upon the life of Jesus, we behold the veil taken from before the face of God.

To the man with anything of spiritual susceptibility the world is full of God; even its splendours and terrors tell of a mysterious reality which is more ourselves than we are. Forgive that curious turn of phrase, but I cannot find another to express what I mean. I mean that what is truest in every one of us is unfathomable; it belongs to the universal more than the particular. There is not a single man among you, however commonplace, who does not belong far more to God than he does to himself; indeed, the self is meaningless apart from God. I must confess that I am never able to gaze upon the glory of the mountain or the flood without feeling that the great reality manifested there has far more to do with me than I have with myself. To be sure, it is a mystery, and might be even a terror; but then "the Life was manifested, and we have seen it." We know what it is now, for we have seen Jesus. Nature may disguise herself as she pleases, but I know she has nothing more to tell me than what I already know about the pulsing heart of it ail:

I have seen Jesus. The round ocean and the living air are language expressive of a beauty and sublimity that are a rebuke to petty ideals and selfish purposes, but the spirit whose presence they reveal is after all only the spirit of Jesus. The roaring torrent, speeding on its destructive way, is but the undertone of the song of the multitude whom no man can number, whose voice is as the voice of many waters chanting the praise of Jesus. Earthquake and tempest, plague, pestilence, and famine, are sombre notes in the universal symphony; but the world need not fear them; they have no meaning other than what earth and heaven have already in Jesus. Death itself is but a mask. He has no terrors for him whose life is lived in constant fellowship with the Highest; we can smile in his face. He is no enemy. What can he do? At the best and at the worst he is the minister of Jesus, and has no other mission and no other meaning. Do you see what I am driving at? Jesus spoke to the world the last word about God. Does any other word matter in comparison? Can there be any other word which has no relation to Him? The one governing thought of my text, the one which I want you to take away with you and apply to every event of your lives, is the declaration that the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of this mysterious universe are one and the same. Seeing Him, you see all; there is nothing more to see. You cannot escape the universe; it is with you alway, even unto the end of

your days. But even at its darkest and hardest it can always be interpreted by one word, and that word is Jesus. God has no more to say.

Just think how this perception will simplify your acquaintance with life. There is but one reality, and that is God; and only one thing we need to know about God, and that was revealed in Jesus. No other power and no other spirit have any dominion over you, unless you choose to fancy that it is so. If you rest quietly in the assurance that that unescapable reality that is with you always, the reality which is fundamentally yourself and everything else, is the spirit of Jesus, what else need you trouble about? Everything else is summed up in that one discovery. This it was that made the first Christians invincible, and what it did for them it can also do for you.

It sometimes seems to me that the one great thing that needs to be done for the average man to-day is to get him to stop thinking that the world can do him any harm, or that it rests with him to put anything right that seems to have been put wrong. The utmost we can do with our lives is to give them up to the all-controlling wisdom and love of God. We do nothing; He working through us can do everything. Let a man once become firmly possessed of this fundamental principle of all spiritual experience, and it will save him from everything that tends to make life fruitless and full of dread. What can you possibly have to reckon with except that



all-pervading presence represented and summed up in the name of Jesus? I mean this statement, too, every word. I do not mean merely that Jesus illustrates the universe; He is the universe. He does not merely reveal the Infinite; He is the Infinite. I even wish you could manage to think about yourself in this way. You are not outside of God; you never were, you never can be. You too belong to the Infinite, and your eternal destiny is the fellowship of Jesus. When the early Christians realised this they laughed at Cæsar and his lions, and bore neither of them any grudge. It enabled them to die without hating the men who killed them, and to live without being afraid of to-morrow. They lost themselves in one all-compelling ideal, the love of Jesus, and they knew that nothing else mattered. One of the greatest of them, perhaps the very greatest, nobly expressed the feelings of all the rest when he wrote: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This is the truth declared in our text, the truth which, as you see, has made Christianity possible, and the truth which is vital to its existence to-day. We cannot do without it. It is fundamental to all goodness, even when only half recognised. Where the spirit of Christ is there is God, and by no possibility can you get away from God, even if you wished to do so. When a bad man tries to live his life by denying this he is attempting an impossible task, for he is running up against Infinity, he is crucifying his own true self. In such a case the spirit of Christ within him will sooner or later destroy the falsehoods by which he is living his life, and that destruction will mean sorrow and pain. The first Christians knew this when they went out to pit themselves against the cruel might of the pagan world. They were perfectly well aware that all the devilry of old Rome would have to go down before the spirit of Jesus, and so it did. The promise, "I am with you unto the end," was grandly fulfilled when the end of that particular form of evil came. It will be so with every form of evil; nothing in the long run can stand against Jesus. The love of God may become the lightning which shatters an age-long lie. You men who scoff at truth, who are trying to live without God, whose lives are built on selfishness, take warning. There comes an end some time, whether soon or late, when the love that hung on Calvary becomes the judge of wickedness and works its overthrow. Every evil deed has its

price in pain, the pain caused by the uprising of the buried Christ. It is no good trying to fight against God, for, being what you really are, truth will claim you through the earthquake, wind, and fire. Life is short at the longest, and here or elsewhere you have got to reckon with Jesus and all that the name of Jesus stands for.

On the other hand, let those of whom the world is not worthy take courage and rejoice. Never fall into weak self-pity. He who is with you all the days is more than equal to the hardest storm that ever blew. No human need is forgotten in the eternal wisdom, and no odds are too heavy for Christ. I wish it were in my power to show every one of you how to recognise the spirit of Christ in your daily concerns and how to trust its redeeming might. You must never think of Jesus as though He were at a great distance waiting for news of what you were doing, and glad to hear that you were doing well. Without Him you have never yet done anything that was worth doing. He is the vine, you are the branches. Look for the eternal Christ in every deed that is worthy of Jesus, and believe it to be irresistible in its operation. In the little self-denials of the home circle, the gracious loving ministries that help to make life pure and sweet, behold the spirit of Jesus. I do not mean merely something like Jesus, something of which Jesus would be glad; I mean the eternal reality itself, the very spirit of the Christ manifesting in our common life.

If you have eyes to see, you can discern the same great principle, the presence of the Christ of glory, in all the tragic and terrible things of life. Take, for example, the wreck of the *Berlin*, which has excited such widespread sorrow and compassion. Here is a terrible event, sure enough, though not one whit more terrible than things which are taking place in individual experience every day, only the general public does not hear about them. But who among us is not moved to admiration by the accounts which have reached us concerning the magnificent behaviour of some of the rescuers and would-be rescuers? All the world is paying honour to Captain Sperling and his little group of helpers who took the last three human beings alive from the doomed ship. There was not much probability that Captain Sperling's own life would survive the perilous attempt; but it did, and as long as he lives the story will be told of the deed which proved what manner of man he was. But not a whit less glorious, though more pathetic, was the self-devotion of the steward who tried to save the little five-year-old boy who had been placed in his charge. When the bodies were washed ashore the little one was found clasped in the arms of the man who had perished in the effort to bring him safe to shore. What are we to say about deeds like these? Every one reverences them, but not every one seems to see the truth of which they are the token. These are the things which ordinary men do on extraordinary occasions,

and in so doing prove themselves divine. This is the very spirit of the Christ who is with us all the days. Given the occasion, and this spirit will always show itself, even in the most unlikely people. I do not want to enter into the question why such a thing as the *Berlin* wreck should ever be permitted to take place. I do not think it is wholly and entirely an impenetrable mystery, but I do not want to discuss it just now. All I want to point out is that no sooner does the need arise or the trouble come than you see a manifestation of the Christ-spirit in some humble child of the Highest. I declare and maintain that this is the true fulfilment of the declaration, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world."

But I maintain even more earnestly that you can see the same spirit in ordinary everyday life wherever the love of Jesus becomes the inspiration of a beautiful action or a noble unselfish purpose. You will not go a dozen yards from this church door to-night without seeing something of it. Go wherever love is trying to bind up the wounds made by hardness and selfishness, and you will see it at once. Look into any life which has been shaped and fashioned by living faith in Jesus, and you will see this promise fulfilled.

Where the many toil and suffer,  
There am I among mine own;  
Where the tired workman sleepeth,  
There am I with him alone.

Never more thou needest seek Me,  
I am with thee everywhere:  
Raise the stone, and thou shalt find Me;  
Cleave the wood, and I am there.

May God open your eyes that you may see this wondrous truth in hourly operation. May He move your heart to give it expression, so that you may one and all enter into the joy of your Lord.

## THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS

“Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” — JOHN viii. 46.

THESE words constitute a standing challenge, addressed not so much to the contemporaries of Jesus as to the moral sense of the human race in all time. It is a challenge which has been abundantly justified. Somehow the civilised world has come almost to take for granted the moral pre-eminence of Jesus. But why *should* the world take that for granted? Why should we regard Jesus as a sinless being? Why should we assume Him to be morally perfect? and why do we hold Him up as the norm and standard of what all humanity ought to be? These are searching questions. Our text, rightly understood, is the answer to them; and I therefore ask you to proceed with me to examine into its meaning, and the purpose with which it is written here.

To begin with, I want you to agree with me that these words in all probability *are not the words of Jesus at all*. This may seem a startling way to begin answering my own question, and I could understand that some of you on hearing that remark might feel that one had given away the whole case. On the contrary, I am perfectly sure that this statement is

the basis upon which the whole case rests: it is the reason why I am so sure about the moral transcendence of Jesus. We have here not so much the words of Jesus about Himself as the *expression of primitive Christian experience about Him*. Christian experience is making exactly the same claim to-day, and has never ceased to make it for nineteen centuries. The following are my reasons for saying that these are not the words of Jesus. In the first place, this book, the fourth gospel, was not written as an historical treatise, and the writer never meant us to understand that it was anything of the kind. It belonged to an order of literature to which the people of the race and the time in which this man wrote were well accustomed; that is, it was meant to teach a certain truth under the form of a story. This man has a purpose in view, and he never loses sight of that purpose from the first page of his book to the last. It is to enable us to listen to the voice of the Christ of Christian experience, the risen, exalted, unlimited Son of God. He wants us to listen to the testimony of the Ideal Humanity, and consequently he begins where the other gospels leave off: he begins with what Christian experience had already realised to be the truth about Jesus. Take his own words: "These [things] are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." That is why he wrote the book. Some years ago an American minister,



Charles M. Sheldon, wrote a book on the title-page of which he put the question, "What would Jesus do?" Forthwith thousands upon thousands of people bought that book — not only churchgoers, but the most unlikely people — and read it simply because of the question on the title-page. They wanted to see what Jesus might be supposed to be saying to men of this generation — business men, professional men, statesmen, and others. Nobody imagined that that story was literally true; it used historical material for a spiritual purpose, and worked it out precisely as the author wished. The fourth gospel, on a grander scale and at a higher altitude, does exactly the same thing. What this man (who appears to have loved Jesus with all his heart, though perhaps he never saw Him) means us to understand is, that you are listening here to the testimony of Christian experience about Jesus; and he wants you to hear through Christian experience the voice of the Jesus whom he supposed to be reigning in glory at the moment when the book was written. I have so much sympathy with that man's work that this is my favourite gospel of the four. It seems to take one right to the inwardness of things, and with unclouded vision we behold the truth, not only about Jesus, but about the divinity of mankind. Remember, then, that this does not profess to be a history; it is a spiritual treatise.

Secondly, I want you to realise that the Jesus of this fourth gospel differs in certain important

particulars from the Jesus of the other three. You can verify that fact for yourself if you will take your New Testament and read it, putting out of sight any prejudice you may now have in mind. For one thing, this Jesus of the fourth gospel talks a great deal about himself; the Jesus of the other three does not. The Jesus of the fourth gospel is represented as making long speeches about His supernatural claims and His moral transcendence. In the chapter before us He is shown as insisting, so to speak, upon those claims and upon the fact that He is a morally flawless being. Now you know that the earthly Jesus would not do that, nor would it be reasonable for Him to do anything of the kind. To expect these prejudiced Jews to believe that he was morally perfect simply because He said so would be utterly unreasonable. It is not the earthly Jesus, it is the Christ of Christian experience who is speaking in these pages and making the claim which Christian experience continues to make for Him.

Further, such a claim, if made by the earthly Jesus, would have defeated its own object; it would have been both useless and absurd. The very issue between Jesus and the Pharisees was the issue between His ideal of righteousness and theirs, His notion of sin and theirs; and they were quite as much in earnest about theirs as He was about His. The Pharisees had an idea, which they had communicated to the whole public, that righteousness

consisted in doing certain things, and unrighteousness in leaving them undone. They were to wash so many times a day; there were just so many ceremonial deeds and ritual performances to be got through; and the Pharisees who did these things "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." It was all a matter of external deeds. They called the people righteous who were, technically speaking, experts in keeping the law; and they called the people sinners who, technically speaking, could not keep the law. Most of you would have been sinners in the Pharisaic sense, whether you are sinners in the sight of God or not; because you have a living to get, you have to work a good many hours a day at that, and you would not have time to become an expert in the keeping of the Deuteronomic code. So there could be only a few "righteous" in their sense, and a great crowd of "sinners," many of whom were good enough in their way. When Jesus came He brushed all that nonsense on one side; He said, in effect, That is not righteousness, and the people you call sinners are not necessarily sinners in the true sense at all. Righteousness consists in being in harmony with God; it is being like God. Sinfulness is being selfish, being unlike God; and some of you men who actually claim to be the custodians of an official righteousness are as selfish as you can be; you are unreal, material, hard, hypocritical. Thus Jesus condemned their notions of right and wrong, and if

there were anything that could rouse Him to anger, it was the kind of man who claimed to be righteous in the Pharisaic sense and despised everybody else.

Now you see how impossible it was for Jesus to make the claim put forth in my text: "Which of you convicteth [that is the word] Me of sin?" Why, they would have convicted Him of sin at once! They said so. They declared: "This man eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners"; "He hath a devil, and is mad"; "gluttonous and a wine-bibber"; and so on. They did not wait for Jesus to appeal to them to be His judge; they condemned Him out of hand. In the end they crucified Him, because they said He was a sinner. According to their standard, they were quite ready enough to convict Him of sin. It is clear, then, that these are not, and could not be, the words of Jesus about Himself. They are the expression of spiritual experience concerning Him. Is that experience justified?

What do we mean by sinlessness? Let us be quite clear about that before we go any farther, because most of the difficulties that have arisen with respect to Christianity have arisen out of confusion about questions of that kind. For instance, theologians are accustomed to effect a separation in thought between God's holiness and His love; and a favourite phrase in the mouths of religious people has often been, "the awful holiness of God." I do not object to that phrase so long as you realise

that the holiness of God *is* His love, and never was anything else. Love knows no compromise, and will be satisfied with nothing less than the highest for and from its object. Thus, if God is love, and you are living a life of selfishness, He will not suffer you to continue doing so; and therefore, if you like to say so, the love of God is the wrath of God. Love, righteousness, holiness, judgment, mercy, wrath, are all one and the same. Sinlessness is to be understood in terms of this ideal, and not otherwise. If you were asked to tell somebody what you understand by sinlessness some of you might say, "A sinless life is a life lived in accordance with the will of God." Yes, but do not forget what the will of God is — it is the highest from you. Or, again, "Sinlessness is life lived in harmony with its own highest." Yes, but the highest of some men is not very high. We will try again. A sinless life is a life lived in harmony with the highest of which human nature is capable; in other words, it is the flawless reflection or expression of the nature of God. God is love, and therefore to express God is to live the life which is perfect love. Human love may be a very selfish thing in some of its manifestations: your love for your child may mean that you hate your neighbour's child; your love for your husband may be that you are jealous of your sister's husband. But love, in the sense that I have described it, means doing the most you can for mankind; it means that your life is one of unceasing

goodwill, that you make the most of yourself for the sake of humanity. There is a duty of self-formation — the utmost for the whole. It means that self is fulfilled in serving the race; it means, impossible though it may seem — because you and I are not living it, you know — absolute disinterestedness; it means a strong and a positive thing, not a weak and a negative.

Have love, not love alone for one,  
But man as man thy brother call,  
And scatter, like the circling sun,  
Thy benefits on all.

It means that if you were living the sinless life, the ideal life, you would be living as though all humanity belonged to you, and you would forget your poor individuality in the fact. If men were living this life it would be heaven on earth; there would be nothing more to be done. But who is living that life? We may agree in the abstract as to what we want, but we do not always recognise it when we see it in the concrete. For instance, suppose I were foolish enough to put forth a claim to personal sinlessness, or some of you were foolish enough to make it for me, and write to the papers and say the minister of the City Temple was the only flawless being in London. Forthwith half the editors in London would receive voluminous correspondence pointing out conspicuous flaws in the character of the man for whom sinlessness was claimed. A little while

ago, if you will pardon a personal allusion, I went to preach in a Baptist church in South London. Just before going into the pulpit a letter was put into my hand written by a very serious-minded individual, in which the writer gave twelve good reasons, according to his standard, why I was morally unfit to enter that sacred pulpit and preach the gospel to the people assembled. I have no doubt there would be somebody else who would have twelve other reasons why one should not enter that pulpit, but I am perfectly certain no two persons would have the same twelve. You would find that "so many men, so many opinions," would hold good in this case. It would seem, then, as though it were impossible to agree upon a standard of moral perfection, and yet, as I have already shown you, that is not so. We all know the standard, but we don't agree about its manifestation. We do not agree as to which man is living up to the morally perfect ideal, and we are often so prejudiced and blind that we cannot recognise moral worth when we see it. Supposing you apply this to what you know about Jesus. I could imagine some one saying to himself as I speak, "But how do you know that your description of a sinless character really is a description of Jesus? Is not the moral ideal you have described one that we have superimposed upon Jesus? If Jesus came to London to-day, and men did not know it was Jesus, would they agree any better about Him than they agree about anything else? Most

of all, supposing He were living the ideal life, as you have described it, the life of love, would they see it? Would they not rather impugn His motives? would they not misunderstand, slander, and persecute as before? They would not nail Him to a wooden cross — for we have had nineteen centuries of the Gospel of Jesus to make that impossible — but they would find other ways of making Him suffer for what He was.” I know all that, but I want to point out to you thoughtful men and women that the ideal concerning man and concerning God, which we all acknowledge in our hearts is the true one, we owe to Jesus: He brought it, He lived it; humanity did not invent it. Jesus *was* it; and it was not only what Jesus said, somehow it was the personality of Jesus Himself that declared it. Little children and sad women came to Him, and He protected them in a time when women were persecuted, wronged, despised. Bad men slunk out of His presence; it took His very murderers some time before they dared to lay hands upon Him. Wonderful personality, tremendous in its impact upon the people who stood nearest to it! This Jesus was recognised even then, in spite of themselves, by the men who hated Him, as morally greater than themselves. One who loved Him well sank down on his knees in a moment of illumination, and said, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.” It was not so much what Jesus said, important as that was, which has been the message of Jesus to the world,



it was Himself. There was no abstraction here; no abstract ideal has ever had any power to regenerate mankind; it was a living, breathing man, manifesting an ideal good, showing Himself able to read God, as men were never able to read Him before. Strange as it may seem, we have not invented Jesus' idea of God, and then asked ourselves whether Jesus was like it; the process has been the exact reverse. We saw Jesus, and then we saw what God must be. It is because such a life was ever lived that men have come to think of God as being what He is, a God of love. The true worth of such a life is evidenced by the standard it has created, and which could not be permanently obscured by prejudice.

Let me put another point strengthening the same position. It is this, though I cannot prove it, and am not going to try: Every personality must be at least equal to its own achievements. Some of you know what I mean when I say that occasionally you are disappointed when you first come face to face with a man of whom you have heard a good deal; somehow he is not quite equal to what you expected. He may be the writer of a great book: in that book you feel you have made acquaintance with a soul that you understand and that understands you; you seek out the writer, and when at last you look into his eyes, and clasp his hand, you feel there is something missing that you expected to find: he is not quite equal to the achievement.

You know that in reality he must be, else he never could have produced the book; but there is the fact, he is no greater, anyway. On the other hand, occasionally one comes face to face with a man of whom one has expected something, and finds more. Great as the man is, you would say, and admirable as his work has been, he himself is greater still; he has not exhausted himself, there are unknown depths suggested there, immense moral and intellectual reserves. In history things have a way of righting themselves in this regard. For centuries men talked about Cromwell as though he had been rebel, regicide, hypocrite and all that was undesirable. Then in the nineteenth century we suddenly woke up to the fact that he was not these: he was one of the greatest Englishmen that ever lived, one of the greatest benefactors of mankind that this country has produced. So we went to the other extreme, and called him all the good names we could think of. Then the dispassionate historian comes along, and puts the great Protector in his right place. He was not immaculate after all; he was great, but he was human, and he had his weaknesses. Americans will pardon me for pointing out the same thing with regard to the father of their country, as they call George Washington. Nothing is too good for you to say about him, nothing was too bad for his contemporaries to say about him. History has a way of restoring the equilibrium. We know just where to put George Washington; we know

his worth, which is a great deal more than that of the average man; he is at least equal to his achievements.

Now what about Jesus? Measure Jesus against any of the masters of men, and ask whether He is equal to His achievements. Jesus has given us God, as some one has beautifully said; Jesus has shown us what God is, not merely by saying it, but by living it. Jesus has been the maker of saints, heroes, martyrs, compared with whom all the masters of men pale into insignificance. Jesus is a living and ever-present force. Some people say the Churches are dying, their influence is growing less and less. Even if that were true I should not care very much, for the influence of Jesus is proportionately rising. Men have not done with Him, and do not want to have done with Him. His is the name above every name, not as a dream or a distant ideal, but as an actual fact. A great man wrote in the twelfth century words we can repeat to-day:

Jesus, the very thought of Thee  
With sweetness fills my breast,  
But sweeter far Thy face to see,  
And in Thy presence rest.

We have not got beyond what Bernard of Clairvaux said as his experience of Jesus in the twelfth century; we are saying, seeing, feeling it to-day. We know this Jesus — man, or God, or both, a transcendent being, the moral ideal, the conscience

of the race, our leader and our goal. We believe in the love of God just because we have seen one life which can fairly be described as a life of love.

What is the good of demonstrating the sinlessness of Jesus? What is the good of saying, Here was the one human life lived in terms of the love of God, and manifesting the highest? It is because what He was we are meant to be. Faith in Jesus involves just that; it is faith in God, faith in love, faith in true holiness, faith in personal self-surrender, faith in what is truest in yourself. The deepest and holiest in you is the expression of God. You are at one with the Father now, and cannot help it. Realise your oneness and demonstrate your sonship. You are climbing to the place whereon Jesus dwelt even on earth; that is why God sent you here. That is what faith in Jesus is meant to produce, this life of unbroken harmony with the ideal good, which is God. On every page of the New Testament it is written large. Saul of Tarsus was a great man, and he did a great thing when he turned his back on the old hardness and materialism of the religion of his Pharisaic upbringing and chose Jesus, with all His simplicity, moral dignity, spiritual beauty; and this is what he said about Him: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine,

or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creation, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." And the writer of the fourth gospel, the man who put on record the question with which we have challenged the world, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" says this also about Jesus: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed us, that we should be called the sons of God." Why, that is what we call Jesus! "And it is not yet manifest what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is."

## THE GIFT OF THE SON

“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” — JOHN iii. 16.

THIS great saying has always been a favourite with Christian preachers, and deservedly so, for in a sense it sums up the Christian evangel. At the present day, as much as in any previous age, it supplies the text for innumerable sermons, especially those which are intended as an urgent evangelical appeal. One may hear this text preached from at street corners quite as frequently as in church. In fact, the greater the warmth of evangelical fervour the more likely is this passage to form the basis of the discourse.

And yet the curious thing about the matter is that this statement is not one which is altogether easy to understand. It is what we may call ethically obvious, but intellectually obscure. Probably every preacher who handles it, from an archbishop down (or up) to a Salvation Army captain, perceives instinctively the moral power of the truth it contains, but it may be questioned whether he always knows just what the writer of it meant by his use of terms. I do not think it will in any way lessen its value for

us if we attempt to make that inquiry this morning. Anyhow, let us try.

There are four terms which demand attention — the “world,” the “only-begotten Son,” the verb “believeth,” and the phrase “everlasting [or eternal] life.” By the world we ought here to understand the totality of the human race living in the consciousness of separateness from God. The only-begotten Son is a term with a complex history. It has become Christianised, but it antedates Christianity. The writer of this gospel certainly borrowed it from the Alexandrian school. It means the eternal Divine Man who is the source of all creation. I must say a little more about this thought presently. For the moment let me point out that in our text, and indeed throughout this gospel, the writer identifies this eternal Divine Man with Jesus. I need hardly point out that the word “believeth” in the New Testament means a great deal more than mere intellectual assent to a proposition; it involves a moral act, the committal of the whole personality to a certain spiritual ideal. We are short of a word to express in English the full force of this Greek word. It denotes an act of the reason, the will, and the moral nature combined. Nowhere in this gospel does the writer employ the noun “faith”; he uses the verb instead; and, as we have in English no verb “to faith,” we have to translate it “to believe.” This is rather awkward, and has led to a great deal of confusion. Even to-day it prevents many people

from seeing that "believing" in the New Testament sense simply means rendering complete obedience to the highest you are capable of understanding. Lastly, by "eternal life" is here meant the life which is love, the unchanging life of God, the life beyond and above all the illusions of time and sense, the life which was before all ages, and the life which will remain when all evil is swallowed up in good and all pain is swallowed up in joy.

Now that we have an approximately accurate idea as to the meaning of our terms, let us look at the general statement in which they are contained, "God so loved the world," etc. What does the average church-goer understand these words to mean? I am beginning to find out that nothing exasperates an ordinary Christian much more than to tell him in plain and simple English what he believes or thinks he believes in reference to God's dealings with the world. This is to me a most curious and inexplicable psychological phenomenon, but it has to be faced. Now, as I am very far from wishing to exasperate any one, will you allow me to say at this point that the only way of understanding any venerable Scripture statement is to examine what we already think we know about it, and then stand apart from it, as it were, and see whether it answers to the facts — just as we should do if we were examining evidence on any other subject. In plain and simple English, then, what the ordinary sermon-hearer thinks about the statement contained



in our text is this: God loves mankind, but mankind has sinned against God. This sin is so serious that God must send mankind to a hell of everlasting torment unless some means can be found of atoning for our guilt. This means has been found in the self-devotion of a being called the eternal Son, who is God Himself, and yet is somehow different from the God who requires the sacrifice. God the Father then punishes God the Son in order that mankind may escape this everlasting hell. The only part mankind has in the matter is that we must individually "believe" in this transaction in order to benefit by it. If we do not believe we are doomed.

This is a plain and simple summary of what thousands upon thousands of our fellow Christians hold to-day in reference to the truth contained in our text. They never look the facts in the face, and somehow, as I have already pointed out, they become very angry when they are asked to do so. The fact is they know instinctively that there is a great and precious truth here, and they are unwilling to tamper with the forms in which it is supposed to be presented, lest they should desecrate or lose it. But the real desecration consists in holding it in a form which dishonours God. "God so loved the world." If this be true, how, under any circumstances, can He doom His children, or any one of His children, even the worst among them, to an everlasting hell? Most people will admit this nowadays without much difficulty. But once they admit it,

it seems strange that they do not immediately see that the whole fabric which they call the scheme of salvation is demolished. If salvation consists in being saved from a future hell, how is man to be saved from it once he gets there? Conventional explanations of my text make no provision for this. If repentance is not enough, without the infliction of suffering upon some third party, of what use is it to talk about the love of God? No one has ever yet been able to show any sensible reason why God the Father should torture God the Son in order to make possible the forgiveness of the sins of mankind. A score of questions at once emerge here to which no answer can be given if the conventional view of the subject is to be accepted. But one thing is quite clear: There is no understandable sense — supposing, I say, the conventional view to be consistently maintained — in which God the Father really gave God the Son for the salvation of the world. Such giving could have cost Him nothing. Why should it? If the whole matter were summed up in the suffering of Jesus on Calvary, the giving did not amount to much; indeed, it did not amount to anything. No; these statements are incoherent: they do not help us in the least when once we look into them; they only serve to obscure the greatness of the subject. When we look at the question reverently and dispassionately we can see well enough that there is no ground in common justice or in common sense why God should torture any one for

any one else's sin; nor that He should torture any one for his own sin, otherwise than for his good. If God is really and truly a God of love, His whole object in His dealings with men must be to save them and to do them good. He can have no other object. There is no abstract justice to be satisfied. He is not thinking of punishing sin, but of saving the sinner; and the only salvation He has in mind is deliverance from the sin itself into the fellowship of love. This is plain, and reasonable, and clear. There is no mystery about it; any one can understand it; and there is no one in the wide world who can consistently deny that, whether it is true or not, it ought to be true if God is love.

Well, now, did the writer of our text see this? Yes, I am quite sure he did, although the forms in which he expresses the truth are not those of to-day. According to current notions, especially among the Jews, in the time in which this writer lived, the world would have to be destroyed, as being at enmity with God. These people were not thinking of salvation as deliverance from a future hell so much as the purging of the world from all the evils that afflicted the children of God. They thought of the Gentile world as essentially opposed to God, and therefore certain to be destroyed when the cup of its iniquity was full. If they had put into words their thought about the matter, it might have been expressed thus: "God so hates the world of human beings that He will utterly destroy them all except a righteous

remnant." But the writer of our text saw plainly that the religion of Jesus gave quite another view of the attitude of God to His creation, so he wrote "God does not hate, He loves."

But he did not stop here. He went on to show that this love of God involved a kind of giving of Himself, an acceptance of limitation and suffering in order to liberate men from the bondage of evil. This was a great thought, and I want you to notice how beautifully he works it out. He says, "God sent *not* His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Now this was a flat contradiction of the current Jewish idea. According to the Jews, according even to such a man as John the Baptist, the very purpose of the coming of the Messiah was the condemnation of the world: all the enemies of God were to be rooted out, and the good alone would be permitted to live on eternally. But, says the writer of our text, this is not so at all. The Messiah has come. He was Jesus the crucified, and the purpose of His coming was to give men that very eternal life which the Jew says they are not to have. He does *not* come to condemn; He comes to save. Now observe that there is here no reference whatever to a future hell; the point at issue is whether men are to live with God or whether they are not. Our author distinctly states that God gave Jesus to the world in order that they should.

Now let us look once more at this word Son. It

is plain enough that this man means Jesus when he speaks of the Son of God, but does he mean anything more? Assuredly he does. He was trained in the great Alexandrian school, which regarded the Son of God as a term to describe God's thought as expressed in creation. I want you to realise here that all these New Testament terms are really very simple if we only get the writer's point of view. By the Son of God he only means the life of God in the soul of man; he means God Himself as expressed in human life. Now, everybody can see that we need a word of some kind to denote the God in man. The being of God extends infinitely beyond and above this finite universe of ours, where we cannot follow or trace it; but nowhere is the being of God more fully present, more real and sacred, than in the soul of man. When we want a word to describe God as we know Him in human life, revealed by human truth and love, we can call Him the Son, but after all we only mean God Himself. This is the word employed in the Johannine writings. The term "Son of God" means, in this gospel and elsewhere, God as revealed in human nature. There is a word I like even better, and that is the word Paul uses; I mean the word Christ. It is such a warm, tender, beautiful word, because of its association with Jesus, that I do not wonder at Paul using it or that Christians love it so much. But what I want you to see is that, whether we speak of the Son or the Christ, we mean the God in man, God's love

in man; we mean *all* the God in man, for God is one. We have seen *that* God supremely in Jesus. We can even go so far as to say that Jesus was and is God the Son, the Christ, the fullness of the Godhead bodily, but then we must remember that that same God is in all humanity too. When we speak of the "only-begotten" Son we must remember that there is but one God after all, and that He indwells all humankind. The only-begotten Son is Divine love as revealed in man. It is the same God in all — the "only-begotten."

Now I think you will see without much difficulty the wider, deeper, more spiritual meaning of our beautiful text. God is always giving Himself in man for man, and that forth-giving of the love of God is the salvation of the world from sorrow and sin. Wherever you see love willingly accepting pain to save and uplift a soul from the lower to the higher, you see God at work gathering His children back to Himself. This is a real giving, a giving that costs something. God suffers and achieves in every brave, noble, Christlike thing that any child of His has ever done for the good of any other. The whole mighty process is epitomised in what Jesus endured on Calvary, and before He came to Calvary, but it was not exhausted there. It is going on to-day as grandly as ever, sublime in its manifestations, irresistible in its effects.

It is always a puzzle to me that men do not see this more clearly. They will readily concede that

God gave us Jesus, but they do not seem to see with equal clearness that God gave Himself in Jesus, and that He still continues to give Himself in everything worthy of Jesus that is making the world better, nobler, kinder. I remember reading during the South African war that the greatest deaths were those of the mothers who died in their sons, the greatest gifts were those of the mothers who gave their sons, the keenest anguish was that of the mothers who suffered in their sons for the sake of England. Here is a figure of the work of God for the world. Try to see how true and beautiful it is. You have only to look around you, and you can see it illustrated any day in almost any home or place of business. You will see God the Father manifest as God the Son for the redemption of the world — that is, you will see the Divine reality in the humblest task that is bravely and unselfishly done. If you have felt your heart stirred to pity to-day by the sorrow of some one you were able to help, you have felt the presence of God in your soul, and he whom you helped felt it too. If some one you know has gone wrong, and you have longed to follow and save him, it is the love of God that is engaged in the quest. If you have believed with all your heart in the possibility of righting a shameful wrong which is breaking some one's heart, you have been able to minister eternal life. If you have really believed in Christ, you must have been manifesting Christ; it could not be otherwise. And wherever any one

has to-day given glad or penitent response to the truth and purity of another, you have seen the faith that works by love, you have seen the manifestation of the life eternal. Do not, I beseech you, make light of this. We know that God loves the world simply because we see that love expressed in human self-devotion and brotherly kindness. If you do not find it there you will find it nowhere. This is verifiable, unescapable fact, which outweighs all the theorising in the world. It makes life sacred and beautiful, and illumines it with a Divine radiance. "God so loved the world" — I believe it when I hear a broken-hearted mother praying for a prodigal. "He gave His only-begotten Son" — I believe it when I come across a surrendered life, a Divine activity like that of the late Dr. Barnardo, inspired by the spirit of Jesus. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish" — how could they? This is faith in love, and love is the ultimate reality of all existence. "But have eternal life" — Ah yes; "this is life eternal: that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

Some one made a most illuminating remark to me the other day. It was this: Most of the blunders of Christian theology have been due to the fact that no woman has had much to do with making it. For the most part it has not only been the work of men, but of men who have been withdrawn from intimate touch with life. To a great extent this



accounts for the hardness and unreality of dogmatic presentations of the religion of Jesus. These presentations lack the very element which was most prominent in the character of Jesus Himself. The power of Jesus was largely due to the fact that there was so much of the woman in Him. I will tell you why I considered this remark illuminating. The feminine possesses more of the self-giving quality than the masculine; the *ego* is less intrusive. A woman is able to sink herself entirely in the well-being of another in a way that is seldom true of a man. What the world needs is the combination of this quality with masculine strength, as it was in Jesus in such a unique degree. It is almost a pity that we think so much of God in terms of the masculine only. Even this word "Son" throws us upon that line of suggestion, and its true significance may be weakened thereby. God is the mother-heart of the universe. If you want a symbol for Divine love, the nearest we can get to it is mother-love. Yet when we are thinking of the Divine love in man we call it the "Son." Perhaps you can see now why I prefer the word Christ. It stands for the self-giving of God, the love that sinks the self in its object. But really it does not matter much what we call it, so long as we see it for what it is. To believe in the Divine Son is to believe in your own divinity and in the divinity of all mankind. It is to believe in the victory of love in the human heart. It is to believe in the one God who indwells all.

It is to believe in Jesus, and all for which Jesus stood. It is to believe in the life eternal, and to help to mediate it to sinful, sorrowing men. Let me repeat, and urge upon you, that to know this, and give effect to it, is to pass from darkness to light; it is to become a saviour. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

## SIN AND SALVATION

“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins.” — LUKE i. 76-7.

THIS passage from the song of Zacharias probably formed part of a primitive Christian hymn. Several of these hymns have been preserved for us in this particular gospel, and very beautiful they are both in form and spirit. They include the Magnificat, the song of the angels on Bethlehem's hill, and the particular song of Zacharias which is our text, as well as the pathetic song of Simeon in the Temple at the presentation of the holy child Jesus. This song of Zacharias, whence our text is taken, is a particularly fine example of sacred poetry. In substance it is an adaptation of Old Testament language to New Testament ideas. The actual date of its composition we have no means of judging, beyond the fact that it must have been earlier than the gospel which contains it, and therefore must have been one of the first definitely Christian hymns ever sung by a congregation. The particular sentence which forms our text, therefore, possesses a significance which can only be rightly understood by getting

into the atmosphere of Judæo-Christian ideas, the atmosphere in which it was born. I need not say much about the personality of the child about whom these words are supposed to have been spoken, John the Baptist. Indeed, there is some probability that originally they did not refer to John the Baptist at all, but to Jesus Himself. Nor is it necessary to dwell upon the phrase "Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord." This is an Old Testament idea, based no doubt upon an allusion to the custom of sending heralds in front of the cortège of an Eastern monarch to announce his presence to his people. The real value of this part of our text consists in the statement that the spiritual man is the way-maker for God. The real weight of the text rests upon the two phrases, "knowledge of salvation" and "remission of their sins." If we can get at the meaning of these two phrases we shall clear up a good deal of the confusion that exists in the minds of some people to-day concerning the relation of the Gospel of Christ to salvation and to sin. Let us take the first of these.

What does the writer mean by "salvation"? It might perhaps be supposed that we are taking this question in the wrong order; it might seem that historically as well as in everyday experience the consideration of sin should come first and that of salvation afterwards. "First find out what is wrong," some of you might say, "and then we shall know best what is needed to put it right." But, strange as it may seem at first sight, this is not the true historical

order of the ideas, neither do I believe that it is the true psychological one. We have to get a vision of salvation first, and then, and not till then, we shall be able to understand what sin is. What then did the Jews of Jesus' day understand by the term "salvation"? They thought of it as primarily social and national, and not individual; if individual, it was only so in the sense that the individual was to be saved for the sake of the nation, and that only those individuals were to be destroyed who were a hindrance to national salvation. The salvation thus looked for was a restoration of national independence and the establishment of a theocratic kingdom of righteousness, prosperity, peace, and joy. In this connection the words of the second Isaiah were often quoted: "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." That is what they meant by salvation; and a grand idea it is, although it was very often crudely held and expressed by some of the contemporaries of Jesus. They seem to have thought that this kind of salvation would be realised all in a moment, as it were, and would be accompanied by a drastic elimination and destruction of all those whose way

of living had been of such a kind as to render them unfit for membership in an ideal commonwealth. At all previous crises in the national history of the Jews the whole nation had suffered together, good and bad alike, on account of the vicious habits of certain individuals. Thus, according to the great preachers called prophets, the fall of Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar, and the carrying away of the flower of the people into captivity in the great city of Babylon, were caused by the self-indulgence and unscrupulousness of large numbers, perhaps the majority, of the nation; but the whole nation had to suffer as a consequence, from the sovereign downwards. The national life was interrupted for a period of about sixty years, and this period was afterwards regarded as having been a time of death. It is in allusion to this that such statements as those of Ezekiel were made afterwards: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." I wonder how often you have heard that text preached from! but it meant originally in the mouth of the man who uttered it that the nation as a whole should no longer be compelled to suffer for the fault of the few; that is, the mischief-makers should suffer as the result of their own transgression, *not* the nation as a whole. "The soul that sinneth *it* shall suffer, or shall die." This, of course, is a rhetorical statement, for no man ever does live a bad, selfish life without hurting other people. But this statement, and others like it, greatly influenced later Jewish ideas on the subject

of national deliverance. When God's good time came, they thought, the wicked man and the oppressor would be cut off, and the purified nation would remain. That was what they meant by salvation.

You can at once see that there are important differences between this idea of salvation and the ordinary modern connotation of the term. These differences are not quite so deep as they look, but they ought not to be ignored or passed over. Ask any revival convert who has been at a penitent form what he means by saying he has got salvation, and I think you will find that he does not mean what these Jews meant in Jesus' day: he means primarily that his eternal welfare has been secured, and that he is going to try to be good now on the strength of that assurance. But the Jew was not thinking about that at all. He was thinking of a regenerated society, primarily of this world, or rather of an incoming of the kingdom of heaven to this world. The link between two conceptions of salvation, the Jewish one and that of conventional Christianity to-day — for there is a link — is that both centre upon the thought of goodness in some form: the Jewish one being mainly social, the conventional Christian one being primarily individual. Now here is a thing which must not be lost sight of. The Jewish idea of the meaning of salvation at its best was almost identically the same as that of the first Christians. I do not know that people are aware of that, broadly

speaking. The difference between the two was practical rather than theoretical. The Christians inspired by Jesus were full of an intense moral enthusiasm, and the Jews were not; that was all the difference. The Christians believed as earnestly as the most patriotic Jews did that salvation would come speedily and would be national, and that Jesus would be the means of realising it. It was due mainly to the Apostle Paul that they came afterwards to see that such a salvation would have to be world-wide, and include all servants of God equally with those of Jewish race. I am afraid it cannot honestly be maintained that the primitive Christian Church as a whole believed in a world-salvation which would involve the destruction of none, but rather the emancipation of all from the thralldom of evil. I believe Jesus thought so, but few if any of His immediate followers did. But that does not matter so very much after all; what does matter is that we should see that primitive Christianity stood for a social salvation based on individual faith and love. It was far nearer to the ideal of a modern social reformer than it was, say, to that of Dr. Torrey and his followers. I am passing no criticism upon the latter; I am only pointing out that the Christian conception of salvation to-day as held by the ordinary man was not that of the primitive Christian Church. When, therefore, a primitive Christian congregation first sang the beautiful words of our text they were expressing the conviction that



Jesus would be the means of giving salvation to the world by driving out of it all cruelty, oppression, suffering, want, and wickedness — the incoming of the brightness of heaven to the darkness of earth. The man who wrote my text was thinking *that*, and that was precisely what he meant.

Now that we have got a fairly clear idea of the meaning of the word salvation, let me ask you to inquire into the significance of the word "sin." The writer says the knowledge of salvation is to be given in the remission of sins. Here we are certainly nearer to the modern conception of the meaning of a New Testament term, but it would be wise to get behind both and to get rid of all artificialities as far as we can in our use of the word sin. Jewish religious literature, even the earliest, says a great deal about sin. You cannot read the Bible without finding that out. But the content of the word as set forth in our English version of the Scriptures is not always quite the same. There are at least half a dozen Hebrew words translated in the Scriptures by the English word "sin." I have not time to examine these separately, nor is there any need to do so; what we ought to recognise here is that the conception of sin was a slow growth, and at first had very little ethical content. Broadly speaking, in the earliest times, not only among the Jews, but among all Semitic nations, such as the Assyrians and Babylonians, sin meant anything which could be regarded as an offence against the Deity. The

Deity was thought of as being possessed more or less by ordinary human passions. It was possible to offend Him without knowing why, just as though He were a human being. You know how often and how easily possible it is at the present day to upset an ordinary man without knowing why or how you are to blame; this is just the way in which the primitive Israelite thought about God. He was great, and high, and terrible, but He was apt to be somewhat uncertain, whimsical, and ready to blaze out into anger on the slightest provocation. It was possible to offend Him without knowing how it had been done, and without being conscious of having done anything which we now look upon as being morally wrong. If you will read the Old Testament with your eyes open you will soon see that that statement is correct. To sin against God in the primitive sense of the word did not necessarily mean that the sinner had anything to reproach himself with beyond the fact that he had put himself by a piece of foolishness outside the protection of Jehovah, through not having been sufficiently careful about Jehovah's wishes and intentions.

As time went on, however, the ethical content of the word became deepened and purified. Men began to feel that Jehovah was a God who wanted righteousness in His followers. Great preachers called prophets urged this upon their hearers continually. It is the peculiar glory of Israel that she could produce men like Isaiah the first and the

second, and men of the moral quality of Elijah and Elisha. These men brought the soul of the nation right again and again, and elevated, purified, and ennobled the moral ideal. Their conception of righteousness never seems to have been so high and noble as that which was afterwards given to the world by our Lord Jesus, but it prepared the way for His. It was an enormous gain for religion when men began to realise that God and the ethical ideal were one and the same. The ethical ideal might be inadequate, imperfect, restricted, in so far as they were able to see it, but still it was the ideal; the servants of God had their faces towards the light. To talk about an ideal at all meant a great deal in religious experience and religious history. They had in their minds the thought of an abstract right which was also the will of God, and this thought became a passion with them. Everything which fell below this ideal they termed "sin." The word "sin," therefore, began to take on a somewhat different meaning from what it had originally borne. Sometimes the particular sin might be a rather trivial and insignificant matter, as we should now judge, but the great point about it was that it was held to be wrong *in itself*, and that God disapproved of it just because it was wrong in itself, and not merely because it happened to offend Him when He was in a particularly unpleasant mood. It was an important moment in human history when that conception first emerged. No language of

ours to-day could in sincerity and depth of feeling exceed on this subject Psalm xli.: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgression. . . . I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." We have never got beyond the exalted feeling expressed in that sublime language.

But all through religious history there has run a tendency towards artificiality in regard to the religious ideal. This has been just as plainly marked in Christian as in Jewish history. It is to be seen in our midst to-day. We are not always real when we talk about sin. A man will allow you to say things about him and everybody else in church, and he will say things about himself, that he would sue you for if you said them the next day in the ordinary course of business. This has been just as plainly marked, I say, in Christian as in Jewish history. No sooner has any advance been made in ethical perception than the new word has become institutionalised and the soul has died out of it. Never has this been more so than in the time of Jesus. The word "sin" was always on the lips of His contemporaries, particularly those of the priestly and Pharisaic order. They called *Him* a sinner often enough, and as a sinner they crucified

Him in the end. Their list of possible sins became indefinitely long. They were always busy with "Thou shalt not." Many of the things they stigmatised as wrong had no moral meaning of any sort or kind. It was wrong to do this and wrong to do that: the disciples of Jesus must not pluck the ears of corn on the Sabbath; Jesus must not heal withered hands on that day; this action might be performed, but another very like it was not lawful, and so on. Is it any wonder that the words of this Jesus, who was so gentle with little children and erring women, descended with scathing force upon these blind leaders of the blind? They had artificialised the moral ideal, and were deceiving people by their language about it; they had robbed the word "sin" of all moral value; they had lost sight of true righteousness in their pursuit of legal righteousness.

The word "sinner" in the mouth of a Pharisee became simply a technical term to be applied to people who were too busy or too indifferent to keep to all the details of the Jewish law. The most malignant taunt they could level against the disciples of Jesus was this: "Your Master eateth and drinketh with publicans and *sinners*" — that is, not necessarily with bad people, but people who did not go to the synagogue, people who did not keep the Jewish law. "Publicans and harlots," said Jesus in reply, "go into the kingdom of God before you" — for at least they are simple and sincere, which you are not.

What to us is meant by sin? What is salvation? And how do we stand in regard to both? The answer to these questions can only be obtained by getting into living sympathy with the spirit of this Jesus, who somehow or other has come to be to the whole civilised world the expression of the moral and spiritual ideal. I do not suppose that I address any one who would deny the crown rights of Jesus in that regard. Let us get back to Him and see what He meant; let us sweep away with a firm hand all the mischievous accretions which have gathered round the conceptions of sin and salvation. All possible activities of the human soul are between two poles — selfishness on the one hand, love on the other. Every conceivable act or thought is the expression of one or other of these two. The selfish man is the man who tries to live for himself at the expense of the whole or even at the expense of somebody else. Self-gratification is guilt when it is indulged in at another man's cost. No man is justified in inflicting pain upon another except for an impersonal end. To serve oneself, feed oneself, glorify oneself, satisfy oneself, at the cost of other people and at the cost of the race as a whole, is what Jesus meant by sin. Sin inflicts no injury upon God except through man. Any deed which limits, hinders, circumscribes from a selfish motive the well-being of mankind or any portion of mankind is sin. Look for the motive, and you have found the thing. On the other hand, love means both more and less

in the mouth of Jesus than it means to many of us to-day. Mr. Bernard Shaw told us in the City Temple one night that he did not like the word love; his experience of stage plays made him distrust it as the medium for the expression of moral and religious ideals. But why should we give that word away? The word does not mean weak, maudlin sentiment, nor ought it to be associated with stormy, selfish passion; it is the lifeward impulse in human hearts; it is the perception of the essential oneness of all mankind, and the desire to do something to realise that oneness. Every deed deliberately done, not for oneself alone, but for some one else or for mankind, is a deed of love, even though it may have very little sentiment about it. You men who are going back to your hard work to-morrow morning would be the last to wish me to speak of you as expressions of the moral ideal called love, but to a certain extent you are. Every honest effort you put forth to do good work for the world is a deed of love. You fathers of families who work eight or ten hours out of every waking day are expressing some aspect of eternal love. Did you ever think of that before? The ordinary commonplace task to which you give your time and strength is not done for yourself alone; you are doing it for the sake of the little mouths you have to feed and for the wife you love so well. In proportion as your own self-interest and desire for your own comfort and success are lost in that of the whole

you are expressing some aspect of eternal love. The ideal life, the life of love, is the life which sees the parts as parts, but with a feeling of the whole. The worst man that ever lived is capable of giving expression to that ideal in some degree, and the best has never done it all the time. In so far as we are able to judge, the only life which ever did it all the time, the one perfectly impersonal life that was ever lived, was the life of Jesus. Surely the instinct of mankind must be right in recognising that the life and character of Jesus were the consistent expression of this moral ideal, the will to live not for self, but for the whole, and therefore for God. Until men had seen that life lived they were not even able to see what sin was. "Depart from me," cried the Apostle Peter, "for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" The presence of this great ideal embodied in Jesus was a rebuke to this poor simple fisherman of Galilee, as it has been a rebuke to many thousands since.

Now, it is a striking thing that Jesus very seldom used the word sin. I suppose it was used so much by the Scribes and the Pharisees that He could hardly bear to take it upon His lips. He does not seem to have wanted to get men to concentrate their thought upon their weaknesses and their wrongdoings, but upon the will of God; that is, upon the Christian ideal, the eternal truth that God is love. Therefore, although He spoke little about sin, He said a great deal about love. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, for ye tithe mint and



rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God. These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." This is living the individual life in terms of the whole with a vengeance, is it not? We have not got to that yet by a long way. Most of us cannot deserve the pathetic absolution of the woman who was a sinner, the despised and abhorred of all the respectable then as now: "Her sins which are many are forgiven, for she *loved much*." I prefer justification by love to justification by faith; in fact, the two are one if we understand them rightly.

Again, and most of all in the fourth gospel, the ideal of Jesus is set forth as a gospel of love: "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." Always the same thing to Jesus — the true life was the life consistently, purposefully lived under the guidance of the Spirit of God, the life that was lived in terms of the whole. There is no other salvation worthy of the name. To get rid of sin is to become

a saviour; you cannot help it. Poor, frail, ordinary, everyday humanity will be a long time in reaching this ideal in its fullness, but to try with the confidence that God wants you to try is to have found salvation. What more do we want than this? It is so extremely simple that men have always been trying to add to it or take from it. "Master, if the prophet had bidden Thee do some great thing, wouldst Thou not have done it?" Scholastic theologians, with their elaborate doctrine of sin, have missed the point half the time: they have represented God as fiercely angry with His poor wayward, erring children, none blinder than themselves. And yet He is so strong and we are so weak, it seems hardly worth while on the part of the Author of the universe to take us so seriously as to torture or destroy us for our pitiful failures: would it not have been better news to tell us that His own love shall yet swallow up and destroy all our selfishness? Of course it would, and that is exactly what Jesus has shown us. Indeed, it is what some people did before Him, although their vision was not so clear about it as His.

Make no mistake, therefore: sin is selfishness, and salvation is love, whether here or anywhere beyond. Sin leads to pain, love leads to joy; sin inflicts pain to serve itself, love willingly accepts pain to save others; sin makes for death, love makes for life; sin is darkness, love is light; sin is finite, love is infinite; sin is selfhood, love is God. It is false to preach that all men are equally guilty before

God or in their own consciousness, although it may be that the worst sinner as the world sees him is not so very bad as God sees him. Religious people mourn that the world is troubling less and less about sin. But it is not true; nothing of the kind. Although we do not employ the generic term so often (which perhaps is a good thing), we say more plainly what we mean, and it is only in church that we talk in vague and general terms about sin. Murder is sin, hate is sin, lust is sin, selfishness is sin, uncharitable judgment is sin. All the things which make men unhappy without lifting them a step nearer God are due to selfishness, and that is sin.

Here, my friends, is your gospel: Jesus came to save you and me from this death-dealing thing, and to show us the more excellent way. He lived it Himself, and they nailed Him on Calvary for it; but His ideal has power to-day, just because He did not shrink from Calvary as the price He had to pay for declaring it. There is no unhappy man or woman in this world to-day but is suffering in some way from the power, the wholly illusory power, of this dread enemy of the race. Either your own selfishness or somebody else's has been working you harm. Realise at once that it is not true that you need to remain the victim of the base and unworthy things in life. You were meant for God. You can escape from self with all its cruel desires; you can rise into oneness with that higher self which is life indeed, because it is eternal love. Do not believe

that any one can stop you from doing this, for it is the will of God that you should do it, and the spirit of Christ is with you in every endeavour to break your chains. This is the knowledge of salvation, and nothing less than this has ever been worthy to be called salvation. "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

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## FROM DEATH TO LIFE

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” — ROM. vi. 23.

THIS well-known passage from the writings of St. Paul has formed the text of many a Christian discourse, and rightly so, for it sets forth in succinct form the great Apostle's thought concerning the change from the dominion of sin to the new life in Christ. It is difficult to keep a subject like this absolutely clear from doctrinal prepossessions; I hope, however, that we may be able to do so to-night, for I think we shall find something here of considerable value, and both reasonable and helpful to ordinary everyday experience.

First, let me ask you to recall what you already think about this passage; then let us see whether there is good ground for supposing that this is what St. Paul meant; and after that let us see what our own acquaintance with everyday life has to teach us as to the rightness or wrongness of the views here expressed. I think I know pretty well what the average churchgoer thinks in regard to this passage and others like it. It is something like this. He thinks it must mean that somehow or other we are

all bad to begin with — so bad that in a future state the justice of God must effect our destruction in some way. Some people would say that the word “death” here is equivalent to annihilation. Others would hold that it should be understood as meaning eternal banishment from the presence of God, a banishment which will be accompanied by the fires of retribution. It is not one here and there, we are told, who shall incur this fate, but the whole human race. There is one way of escaping it, and only one — namely, faith in the redeeming work of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. I must not enter into the question as to what that redeeming work has been held to be, for I cannot spare the time just now. The supposition is that somehow by His death on Calvary Jesus has put everything all right for us, so far as God is concerned, if we will only accept the deliverance as a free gift.

Do you think this is what St. Paul meant? I am speaking, of course, of the ordinary conventional interpretation of the text. Do you think that this is what the Apostle means us to infer from his words? If it were it would prove him to be a rather foolish sort of person, and not at all the great man that Christians have hitherto believed him to be. For comparatively few in the history of mankind have ever heard of this redeeming work of Jesus, much less accepted it. In Paul’s own day the whole civilised world was in ignorance of it with the exception of a few groups of Christians here and there.

Do you think Paul had forgotten this? Of course he had not. If admission into heaven, if escape from the fires of retribution and eternal banishment from the presence of God, depended upon the intellectual acceptance of some particular doctrine of the redeeming work of Christ, then St. Paul was teaching something unreasonable, for the overwhelmingly larger number of the human race had never even heard of it. Whatever he may have meant by this sentence, then, he certainly did not mean what his interpreters have since come to teach in his name. Well, what did he mean? To begin with, it is pretty clear to an unprejudiced reader of the New Testament that St. Paul thought of physical death as having come into the world as the direct consequence of the sin of our first parents. He says this over and over again. "As by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin . . . and so death passed upon all men," and so on. But he does not remain faithful to this literal interpretation of what he conceived to be the meaning of a great spiritual truth. He glides easily into a mystical interpretation of the same fact, and thinks about death as meaning something quite other than mere physical death. He uses the word in a moral sense. When he says "The wages of sin is death," he means the death of *soul*, the death of that which is good in human experience, the choice of that which is the very opposite of the eternal life which Jesus came to reveal. If you read the context of these words you

will soon see what he means. Speaking about certain sins of the flesh, he says, "What profit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?" and adds, "the end of those things is death." Then without a pause he goes on to utter the words of our text: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Here you see then from the context St. Paul is speaking of sin in general, and illustrating it by a reference to sins of the flesh. He wrote this letter at a time and to a society where sins of this kind were specially prevalent. I need hardly remind you that he was writing to Romans. At this time Rome was not only the capital of the great empire called by that name, but the very centre of civilisation itself. Roman luxury had developed an extraordinary proneness to sensuality, a sensuality which was gradually destroying the manhood of the Latin race, and led in time to the overthrow of that world-wide empire in which St. Paul himself was a subject. This sensuality showed itself in various forms, some of them wholly unmentionable in an audience of this kind. In the *Meditations* of the great stoic Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, for instance, you will find a reference to his foster-father, Antoninus Pius, in which the latter is praised for many virtues, amongst them being the fact that he had managed to overcome all tendency towards a particular and unnameable form of sensual vice. Imagine that being said now as to the credit of a great man!



Marcus seems to have thought that this was so exceptional as to be noteworthy in a man he loved and revered as a father. You can imagine, then, what the general state of Roman society must have been. At this time amongst the worst and most heartless promoters of this evil were highly placed Roman ladies. This was the most sinister sign of the times, as Tacitus shows us in his "Germania," where he describes the habits of our barbarian forefathers of Northern Germany, and says that these savages were clean-living, high-minded, pure-souled men, who had a respect for chastity, and that the polluted society of Rome was certain to go down before them. So it has done. The British Empire, for instance, has been built partly upon the ruins of the Roman Empire. Why? Because the end of the practices of those old Romans was certain to be, politically and morally, death. The noble Roman matron of ancient times had been replaced by cruel and licentious voluptuaries, who were gradually sapping the manhood of Rome and preparing the way for the downfall of the empire of the Cæsars. This is what St. Paul has in mind as he writes. He knows, and all his readers know, and we know to-day, that the end of these things is death.

But this is not the whole of his meaning. He uses this well-known fact, as I have already said, to illustrate a spiritual law — namely, that sin is the deathward tendency in the human soul. He is not thinking of any future hell, although such an

idea may have been in the background of his mind, but of the unescapable truth that if a man yields himself to sin of any kind he yields himself to something which makes for the destruction of what is good, true, and God-like in him. "The wages of sin is death"; but what is sin?

This is a word which occupies a large place in religious literature, although it is one which Jesus seldom used. Have you noticed in reading the New Testament how comparatively seldom Jesus uses the word "sin"? He seems to have placed the stress of His teaching elsewhere. He insisted upon life, and the way to realise life, the ageless life, the life eternal, and so on. But it is comparatively seldom that He talks much about sin. I cannot help feeling that this was because so many people in His day were using the word "sin" in a false and wrong sense. When Pharisees talked about sin Jesus felt that they were missing the mark. They never thought of accusing themselves of it; instead of that they accused Him. The typical theologian holds to-day that sin is some vague kind of moral foulness before God of which humanity has been guilty without being able to help itself, and in spite of all that God could do to prevent it. The ordinary phraseology about sin amounts to a flagrant contradiction. We are told in one breath that we have inherited a deplorable tendency to evil which we cannot escape, and in the other that we are verily guilty before God, and must expect punishment for

it because we have deliberately sinned against the light. Jesus never talked like this, and I think it would now be generally agreed that He saw more clearly what was the matter with human nature than anybody up to His time.

Some people have been telling you lately that your preacher of this evening denies the reality of sin. One fairly prominent writer, so I understand, has promulgated the statement that my teaching is equivalent to a declaration that God does not care whether we sin or not, and that as there is no sin there is no need of atonement. There is only one word to describe that kind of statement, and I do not like to use it. It is utterly untrue, and it is not difficult to see the motive behind declarations of that kind. It is the desire to distort and misrepresent any mode of stating truth with which the writer disagrees. I do not think I need now repeat what I have previously said regarding the nature of sin, but perhaps, for the sake of greater clearness in the examination of my text, I had better do so. Sin is nothing other than selfishness. Even rebellion against God of a most deliberate character — and I have never yet met a man who would acknowledge that he had been guilty of that — is ultimately selfishness: it is the attempt to live for oneself at the expense of some one else or at the expense of the common life. Every thought, feeling, and desire which springs from a selfish motive is sin. All possible activities of the soul are between selfishness

on the one hand and love on the other. Everything that you have thought or done or desired to do this day is in one or other of those two directions: you have either been fulfilling the self by serving the whole, or you have been trying to feed the self by robbing the whole. At every moral crisis in a man's career he is called upon to choose between one of two courses — the selfward or the Godward. The good life is the life lived for impersonal ends, the life steadily and deliberately lived in terms of the whole, the life which makes the most of itself in order to become a perfect gift to the whole. The bad life is the life which tries to draw away from the whole, or to gratify itself at the expense of the whole. So far as we are able to judge, there has only been one perfectly consistent life, one utterly disinterested life, earnestly and purposefully lived all the time for the whole, and that was the life of Jesus. But no man is so utterly depraved but that some time or other in his thoughts and deeds he gives expression to the same ideal. I was told by a painter at Carbis Bay yesterday that in a visit of his to the United States he came across the following incident. He was a poor man then himself, the weather was very bitter, and he felt somewhat bitter himself and resentful against God on account of the hard destiny that had been meted out to him. So, as he says, he was in anything but a religious frame of mind when the following event took place. He was passing along the street one day, and heard

some men coming towards him, using foul language — language which, if they meant it, amounted to blasphemy; and for the moment, in spite of his own despondent condition, he shuddered at the words which they were so glibly uttering without any apparent sense of responsibility for their meaning. Then his eye fell on a poor little child walking by the side of a young mother. Every now and then the latter lifted the child up in her arms and carried it as long as her feeble strength would permit; and the poor little thing was blue and numbed with cold. The onlooker's heart went out to them in a wave of pity, but he had nothing to give them. Forthwith, to his surprise, one of these very men whom he had heard blaspheming picked up that little mortal, put her under his buckskin coat, and warmed her by the heat of his own body. At the same time, thrusting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out all the money he had and gave it to the mother, telling her to go and get a good meal for herself and the child. The reason why I mention that actual and authentic experience told me by a man yesterday, whose heart thrilled at the remembrance of it, is this, That bad man, as we should call him, that seemingly depraved specimen of humanity, who was blaspheming God with his words, was manifesting Him in at least one of his deeds. The lifting up of that suffering child and placing her next to his heart was just the offering of himself to something outside himself; it was his way of ministering to the common

life; he did it along the line of his own experience of human need. Now all men, every one of us, the most selfish man or woman in this hall, has been doing that to some extent even to-day. None of us is so utterly depraved but that some time or other in our experience we sink the self in order to serve the whole, and get the immediate reward that comes from the consciousness that this is life indeed, the thing worth doing, the thing likest God.

Do let us be real in what we are saying. Wherever and whenever this ideal is betrayed, sin emerges. I do not care whether you use the word sin or not, so long as you see that the one great enemy of mankind to-day is selfishness. Destroy that, and you have destroyed the root cause of most of its miseries. But sin has never injured God except through man. It is as you hurt the common life that you have sinned against God; it is the God within that is injured rather than the God above and beyond the universe: the God above is too strong for you; you cannot injure Him. You injure the indwelling God when you hurt your brother. As one of these early Christians once said, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." Sin makes for death, love makes for life; sin lessens human joy, love increases it; sin destroys, love creates; sin separates the soul from the source of all good, love bridges the gulf again. To live the sinful life is cutting yourself off from the source of all life. Sin

never pays in the end; it is the false life, and therefore leads to pain. Sooner or later, in this world or the next, the false must give way to the true, selfishness to love, the sinful soul to God. If you want proof as to what sin will do, look into the face of a man who is living a selfish life, and you will find God's verdict written there. When Paul wrote these words which form our text no doubt he had in mind the coarse, bloated face of some man or woman who had been living to the flesh and of the flesh had reaped corruption. Go down into the worst quarters of our great cities to-night and you will read the same tale. I don't mean that you need to go to the slums — the West End of London would do. Every drunken *roué*, every painted harlot, was once a child with a face pure and innocent as an angel of God. What do you read there now — life? Ah, no! These do not know life in their fevered rush after the things of time and sense. What you see there is death: death to purity and goodness, death to holy aspirations, death to finer feelings, death even to what deserves the name of joy. "The wages of sin is death." You need feel no anger as you gaze upon these, only a great surging pity such as Jesus would have felt, for these lost ones know not the life that is life indeed, the life eternal, the life which is to know God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

But I am not going to let you go away from this place to-night with the impression that sensual folly

is the worst kind of sin that can be sinned. Jesus did not think so, as you know. Paul's figure of speech applies even more to other ways of missing the road that leads to life. No sins are so deadly, believe me, my friends, as respectable sins. Jesus knew this, and did not hesitate to say so. He was saying so all the time, until at last they crucified Him for saying so. The worst forms of selfishness are those in which pride and hard-shell piety have their place. It was the self-satisfied religious people with whom Jesus was least able to do much, and He would find it so to-day. Look at the kind of people who so often pose to-day as the authorised exponents of the religion of Jesus. They talk glibly about sin, without dreaming apparently that their own kind of sin is the worst of all. They, the followers of Jesus! That is the terrible damning lie which is stifling religion to-day as it has tended to do in ages past. Look at the spirit shown by many of these professed followers of Jesus. What have intellectual arrogance, smug self-complacency, hardness, bitterness, contemptuousness got to do with Jesus? What has the scramble for high places in Church or State got to do with Jesus? What has the desire to grab and keep and hold as much as you can gather into both hands of the material wealth of the world got to do with Jesus? But the men who do that are often champions of orthodoxy! Oh, get rid of all this unreal talk about sin, as though sin were something that had nothing to do with the



spirit shown by a man in the ordinary ways of life. "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He shall lift you up." "Except ye receive the kingdom of God as a little child, ye shall in no wise enter therein"; and that man who has not the spirit of the little child is under the dominion of sin, whether he realises it or not. "If a man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." "If ye were blind ye should have no sin, but now ye say, We see, therefore your sin remaineth." You do not know the real Jesus; you do not know the life eternal which is God and the knowledge of God. "The wages of sin is death."

Now that we have a fairly clear idea as to what is really meant by sin, let me ask you to look with me at the latter half of our text: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." What does St. Paul mean us to understand by this? I am quite willing to admit that Paul's way of stating his experience of the saving work of Christ is foreign to our modes of thought and speech to-day. I wish you would allow for that when you are reading the New Testament; it would simplify a great deal for you what seems complex now and illumine a good deal that seems obscure. We do not think in Paul's symbols, and that is one reason why he has been so commonly misinterpreted. I wish some concerted and determined effort could be made to rescue Paul from the hands of the so-called orthodox theologians. The misuse of Paul has been a fruitful source of

error in Christian thinking, and the only cure for it is to get back to Jesus. It is a marvellous thing that although the letters of Paul were written before the gospels, yet the words of Jesus in the latter seem to take us into another mental atmosphere. He is simple where Paul is complex, clear where Paul is turgid. One of the surest signs of the greatness of Jesus is this very fact. What he said might have been said to-day; it holds true for all time. His words are, as Ian Maclaren calls them, jets of truth, deathless words, words of eternal life. How Jesus managed to escape the mental dialect of His time, how He could continue to speak about the eternal verities without making much allusion to contemporary modes of Jewish thought, must always remain a mystery. His words, I say, might have been uttered to-day; they are not for one generation only, but for all generations. I have noticed many a time when I have been addressing even the most promiscuous of congregations, including people who never go to church at all, that if I utter one sentence from the words of Jesus, — say, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” or “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” everybody listens at once; it seems as though they never grow tired of the words of Jesus. They are everlastingly fresh and new, as though we had never heard them before. Fundamentally, Paul always means to declare the same moral and spiritual truth as Jesus, but his way of doing so is utterly different.

Theologians have spent too much time in trying to explain Jesus by means of Paul; how would it be if they took a turn at trying to explain Paul by means of Jesus?

Suppose we try to do it now. Here, then, are Paul's words: "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Now, what does "eternal life" signify with reference to Jesus, and in what sense did Jesus bring this gift to Paul? Directly we turn to Jesus the whole subject becomes luminous. We have only to read that magnificent paradox contained in all the gospels in order to see what Jesus thought about eternal life. If there is one authentic saying in the New Testament, it is this: "Whosoever shall save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it." The saying appears twice in St. Luke's gospel, so apparently Jesus uttered it more than once; but the second time the words, "for My sake," are omitted. It reads this way: "Whosoever is willing to save his life shall lose it, and whosoever is willing to lose his life shall save it." Take, again, the striking saying in the fourth gospel: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." This means substantially the same thing as the paradox I have just quoted. Some of you might say that perhaps it is not authentic, because it is contained only in one gospel, and that the latest of them all; but I think we should all agree that it is thor-

oughly in accord with the general attitude of Jesus, and at any rate it shows what the earliest Christians thought about the significance of His life and work. For it is not merely what Jesus said that tells us what He thought, but what Jesus did. We have to allow for the impression He made upon those who stood nearest to Him, and the sum of the whole matter is this: If you want to know what life really is, the life which was before all ages, the deathless life, the life which never grows old, the life eternal, you must surrender yourselves, utterly and completely, to the service of the whole, which is the will of God; the self must go upon the altar, or, as Paul has put it, be crucified with Christ; you must be willing to keep nothing back; you must act and think as though you are here for the sake of the whole race and not for your own individual self-interest; you must live as though you had no personal end to serve, and no will but that of the universal Spirit, who is the source and the goal of all humanity. This is terribly hard for ordinary human nature to do, even the best of us; it must mean a crucifixion of some kind; how could it mean anything else? None of us has ever succeeded in doing it all the time, but our Master did it, and in His spirit we may hope in the end to do it too. It means that our individuality is fulfilled and completed only when it realises itself to be, so to speak, a perfect gift to Christ for the sake of the whole, which is your reasonable service and the good and

acceptable and perfect will of God. This is the truth which Paul had grasped so clearly, as had all the rest of the apostolic band; but if it had not been for Jesus they would never have known it. In the life of Jesus they had seen it ideally embodied and expressed. Is it any wonder that they loved Him with such passionate devotion? They lost themselves in Jesus to find themselves in God. It was a grand life, they all felt it to be such; not one of them would have exchanged it for the old life of selfish fears and wants and hates. Look at the Apostle Peter, for instance: he thought at first he had done something great for Jesus in following Him at all, and so when the great crisis was drawing near he said to his Lord, "Lo, we have left all and followed Thee; what shall we have therefor?" But afterwards this same Peter, the very same Peter who wanted to know what he should get for following Jesus, acknowledged it his greatest joy to lay down his life for Him. Jesus had promised him something great, and he got it — the honour of dying a martyr on a cross for his Master and his Gospel. It must have made a difference, this great change! All these first Christians knew it. "We know," wrote one of them "that we have passed from death to life, because" — because what? — "because we love ——" "We love Him because He first loved us." "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He [Jesus] laid down His life for us, and we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Here it is, this secret of eternal life — the hardest thing in the world, young men, and yet the easiest. Live for impersonal ends, and trust yourselves to God. It is a glorious life! Let your life flow out to all mankind, and, if need be, be prepared to suffer for your ideal. Suffer you must in a selfish world, just as Jesus had to suffer; but the suffering cannot kill your joy; it is the joy that no man taketh from you, the meed of Him “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame.” This joy is God’s free gift to you and to all who try to live the ageless life. Just as selfishness leads to the death of all worth having, so love leads to more and ever more abundant life. A Divine law holds good in either case, a law that knows no exception. “He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap eternal life.” Is there any mystery about it? Is it not self-evident? Cannot you see it exemplified in your own experience and that of your fellows every day of your life? But for Heaven’s sake do not materialise and institutionalise this truth. There are many whose lives are a blank denial of it who yet believe themselves to be in the inner circle of the friends and followers of Jesus, but for all their doctrines and catechisms they have never obtained a vision of the real Jesus. But the ragged street urchin knows something of it as he carries his hard-earned penny home to buy bread for a starving family; the tiny

glow in his little heart tells of a Divine mystery, the secret of eternal life. Why is he happy as he lays out his penny? You can tell. The God who placed the glow in his heart, who uttered Himself in that action, is bestowing upon him some measure of the life eternal. The man with the lifeboat knows it as he goes out to rescue the passengers from a doomed ship — men and women whom he has never seen or heard of before in all his life — without giving so much as a thought to himself. The champion of an unpopular cause knows it as he goes out with his comrades to break down the forces of selfish indifference in the name of justice and truth. That young fellow on the threshold of manhood knows it as the vision flashes upon him that to live for pleasure or success is mean and ignoble, while to live for ideals, the full fruition of which he will never live to see, is alone worthy of one who walks the same earth as Jesus. As he lifts his face to the stars, his heart thrills with a new sense of gladness and power. It came from God, and it is God; it is the life eternal. Yes, this is the life that is life indeed, and the more closely it is lived to Jesus the greater our grasp upon eternity.

Oh, all you weary ones, who wonder whither the soul of life has fled, try the plan of Jesus. Perhaps you have no confidence in yourself. Well, be it so; begin by having confidence in Him. All you people who have been doing wicked things, stop doing them, and believe that it is easier to serve the higher

than the lower, no matter how impossible it may seem. God is with you when you choose life instead of death. All you nerveless, patient, sad-hearted people, you self-distrustful people, who wonder what life is all about, come and look at what Paul learned from Jesus — and what a Paul it made! This man who went about haling men and women and committing them to prison was the Paul who afterwards lived to say, “For to me to live is Christ.” “Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” There had been a change somewhere, for him to be able to say that. You are just the kind of people that Jesus used to be able to help so much: He found it much harder to deal with the people who had plenty of everything and were thoroughly well satisfied with themselves; He could not get on with them at all. “The publicans and harlots,” He said, “go into the kingdom of heaven before you.” Begin life again with Jesus, all of you who feel that you are down and want to get up. Strive towards the life eternal, the life which is love, and you shall leave all your shadows behind. There shall come to you such an exaltation of spirit that no earthly sorrow, however terrible, shall ever be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



## THE ATONING WILL

“Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do Thy will, O God.” — HEBREWS x. 7.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews has an interest of its own, and occupies a special place in the New Testament, because it is probably the only writing we possess from the pen of this particular author, whoever he may have been. In our Authorised Version the Epistle is attributed to St. Paul, but it cannot be the work of St. Paul. New Testament scholars are now practically agreed that this is so, for the various letters of St. Paul, such as Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, belong to quite a different category from this one. The style is different and the point of view is not quite the same. Personally I incline to the view that this Epistle was written by the learned and courtly Apollos, who, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, came to Ephesus in the wake of St. Paul, and there obtained a deeper insight into the religion of Jesus than he had possessed before. Apollos was an Alexandrian Jew, a fact which in itself is significant of a great deal. At this time Alexandria was the greatest religious and philosophical centre in the world,

and the great school of Alexandria had more to do with the welding together of Greek culture and Hebrew religion than any other single influence whatsoever. The Jew of Palestine and the Jew of Alexandria were quite different types. As the former grew narrower in his outlook upon life, the latter grew broader. Perhaps this difference was largely due to a man called Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, and a great thinker, who taught at Alexandria, whose aim it was to combine the breadth of Greek philosophy with the high seriousness of Israelitish religion. Hence there grew up in Alexandria a great religious philosophy which later on was laid hold of and transformed by Christianity. It is not too much to say that in the first three centuries of Christian history Alexandria was the fountain-head of intelligent Christian thinking, typified by men like Clement and Origen, men whose names are a power in the world of thought even to-day. In my judgment Origen, who was considered too heterodox to find a place among the saints in the Roman Calendar, was the greatest saint and thinker of them all. We are getting back now to some of the truths that Origen used to teach.

How much Apollos had to do with making Alexandria a centre of Christian learning we do not know, but probably a great deal. It was therefore a very important event when this man came under the influence of the Apostle Paul, as seems to have been the case. Before long, however, the influence of

Apollos upon the Churches of Asia Minor rivalled that of Paul himself. We learn from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that the little Church at Corinth, for example, had actually divided into parties, some calling themselves followers of Paul and others of Apollos. This may well have been the case, for the learned Alexandrian Jew must have been a man of considerable personal charm. In a later chapter (1 Cor. xvi. 12) Paul makes a beautiful reference to him, which goes to show that the two men remained good friends in spite of these divisions. After Paul had been complaining that the Corinthians were talking about the party of Paul, the party of Apollos, the party of Cephas, the party of Christ, and so on, this is the way he concludes: "As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren; but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time." That is quite a tender touch, and a beautiful sidelight upon the character of Apollos. Evidently he was unwilling to go to Corinth at a time when there was some inclination to glorify him at the expense of his great and noble friend. So Paul urged in vain. Is it not just like Paul's magnanimity? He has told the people not to talk about the party of Paul and the party of Apollos, and yet at that very same instant he wants Apollos to go to Corinth, and Apollos will not go; he says he will put off his visit until a "more convenient time."

Now this is the man who, as I think, wrote this Epistle to the Hebrews. I cannot give you now all the reasons why I think so, but here are one or two of them. First, it is clear that the writer of this treatise knew Jewish religion thoroughly, and Greek culture not less so. Then he makes free use of the allegorical method, a method which was characteristic of the school of Alexandria. We learn from the Acts of the Apostles that Apollos was "mighty in the Scriptures," and that he "publicly confuted the Jews, proving by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ." One cannot help thinking that in this Epistle — addressed to Jews, remember — we have some of these powerful discourses which so delighted the Christians and confuted the Jews. They are probably the very words he used; they are just the kind of thing in which Apollos would be a master. The whole Epistle from beginning to end is a series of Old Testament illustrations of the life and work of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. We must beware of taking them too literally, for if we do we shall miss the point. Apollos never uses Old Testament language as anything else than illustration of the spiritual truth he wants to teach. No doubt to some modern readers his way of putting things may seem a little dry and occasionally far-fetched, but that is because our mental dialect is not quite the same as his.

You must forgive me for this lengthy introduction to our text, but I wanted to help you see the kind of

man who, as I think, wrote it, so that you may the better realise what he is aiming at in the text itself. I wish we had Apollos himself here to explain his use of the words which form our text, for I have no doubt whatever that his personality would make them live for us as vividly and impressively as they did for his primitive audiences of Christians and Jews.

To begin with, then, I will ask you to notice that this is one of the numerous quotations which Apollos makes from the Old Testament Scripture. It is from Psalm xl. 7. Apollos evidently did not use the Hebrew, but the Greek translation called the Septuagint, which was generally used in Alexandria. There is a slight difference between the two. The whole passage, including the immediate context as translated from the Hebrew in our Authorised Version of the Old Testament, is as follows: "Sacrifice and offering Thou didst not desire; mine ears hast Thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering has Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart." There is a grand ring about that old Hebrew sentence. But I dare say you have noticed that, although there is no serious discrepancy between the two, yet this is not quite the same rendering as that which Apollos gives us in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Instead of "Mine ears hast Thou opened," Apollos writes, "A body hast Thou prepared me." Again, in the text itself the Psalmist

has, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God"; Apollos, following the Septuagint, says, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." I think the Hebrew is better, as we shall see when we look further into it. For what did this passage originally mean — not to Apollos, but to the Psalmist? If we can only get a clear idea of what the Old Testament writer meant by these words, we shall be sure to be on the track of what Apollos meant.

The psalm which contains them belongs to a comparatively late date in Israelitish history, and was composed under the influence of the prophetic rather than the priestly spirit. It is a plea for spiritual instead of ritual worship. I suppose you all know that the prophet and the priest right through Israelitish history stood for two contrasted ideals in faith and worship; it is so even to-day, for the two types of mind are always to be found wherever religion exists. I dare say you will find the prophetic habit of mind here in this audience, and close beside it the priestly habit of mind. Broadly speaking, the prophet has always stood for spontaneity, freedom, the inwardness of religion. The priest, on the other hand, has insisted upon the value of forms and ceremonies, and the necessity for obedience to ecclesiastical order. I do not mean that the prophet has always been right and the priest always wrong. It is not so, but on the whole the prophet has generally been nearer to the spiritual ideal than the priest. It is so here. The author of this beautiful

Old Testament hymn belongs to the order of the prophets, and his object is to recall the mind of the worshipper from ritual observance to moral and spiritual values. "Burnt offering hast Thou not required: yea, Thy law is within my heart." You see where he puts the emphasis. The peculiar sentence, "In the volume of the book it is written of me, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God," is no doubt a reference to certain familiar passages in earlier prophetic books. For example: "This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? . . . but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it" (Deut. xxx. 11-14). When we remember that this was the book which in the reign of King Josiah and at a time of great national revival was discovered in the Temple, we can understand the Psalmist saying what he does. I should not at all wonder if the Hebrew original of our text was a distinct reference to that particular passage in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Psalmist means that his religious experience is like that described in the prophetic passage in the Book of Deuteronomy: "Yea, Thy law is within my heart." It is that the worship which is acceptable to God is the worship of a consecrated, unselfish, noble life. Here we have a sort of anticipation of those fine words of St. Paul: "I beseech

you, therefore, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

In the use that he makes of the Old Testament passage is the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews careful to maintain the original meaning? I think you will agree with me that that is a very important question. We have now made sure of what the Old Testament writer meant by his words: they had a purely spiritual significance; they were a protest against ritualism and externalism in religion. Now, is Apollos careful to keep that meaning before his own mind when he uses the words? I think he is, but he deliberately expands the meaning. He thinks of the passage in relation to the sacrifice of Christ, which of course the Psalmist did not. The Psalmist was thinking of himself or of the typical worshipper in general. The thought of Apollos concerning it is somewhat as follows: First, he says the Jewish sacrificial system has no vital efficacy for the doing away of sin. Look at Hebrews x. 4: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." It requires

A sacrifice of nobler name  
And richer blood than they.

Now, please listen carefully to what I have to say next. No doubt we should all agree with Apollos that what is wrong with the world cannot be put right by the slaughter of bulls and goats, or by any



other kind of ritualism. But what *will* put it right? Apollos tells us distinctly that the sacrifice of Christ will do it, and nothing else. Here are his words: "Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me); I delight to do Thy will." "He taketh away the first that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Unless we carefully keep in mind here the original spiritual meaning of the Old Testament passage quoted by Apollos, we shall fall into the very blunder from which he was trying to save his Jewish readers; I mean that we might materialise this spiritual principle. We might regard Christ as having done something for us which we need not do for ourselves or for any one else. Apollos did not mean that; certainly the Old Testament Psalmist never meant anything remotely approaching it. One of the most lamentable things in Christian history is the way in which this mistake is made over and over again, as though it had never been corrected before. I have no doubt I address some people who have been taught to think that when Jesus died on Calvary He bore in some mysterious way the punishment of all the sins that had ever been committed by mankind, as well as those of all the generations yet unborn, and that if you will only accept by faith this finished work, as it is called, you will escape in the world to come all the penal consequences of your own wrongdoing, however richly you may deserve them.

But, my friend, this is not true, and ought not to be true. The falsehood would never have lasted so long but for the truth behind it, the truth which is clearly and plainly stated in my text, and which I am now going to try to apply to your life and mine. Before doing so let me repeat, then, as definitely as I can, that in this passage, taken by Apollos from Psalm xl., there is not a trace of the shadow of an idea that any one has ever borne the punishment of any one else's sin, or that the Saviour does for the sinner what the sinner does not need to do in his turn for himself and for mankind. You really must not materialise the work of Christ; if you do you will be on the side of the Jewish priesthood rather than on that of Apollos and the Psalmist. The work of Christ is either inward and spiritual or it is nothing. Magical and mechanical it never was. "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire. . . . I desire to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within my heart."

What, then, is the truth about the matter? What did and does Christ do for mankind? By the word "Christ" for the moment I mean the very Jesus of Galilee and Jerusalem: before we finish I want to give that word the larger meaning which it bore in the minds of Apollos and Paul. What, then, did Jesus do for mankind? The first thing He did was to live a perfectly unselfish life. That seems an absurdly simple thing to say, but the living of that life was not a simple thing to do. We could not do

it, we are not constituted to do it; some of us no doubt succeed better than others in approximating to it, and when that is so we say, there is a Christ-like life. We mean a life like that of Jesus. But until Jesus came men had never known what it was even to see such a life lived. It was God's way of showing the world two things: first, the kind of life which is the fullest human expression of His own; and second, the kind of life which ought to be, and shall be ours when we are perfectly at one with the will of our Father. Without entering into any elaborate discussion at this moment as to who Jesus was, let me remark before passing on that the nature with which He was born was such as to enable Him to live this perfectly unselfish noble life. But what would be sure to happen to such a life as this in such a time as that in which Jesus lived? What would happen to Him to-day? I dare say we should not nail Jesus on a wooden cross if He came now, but we should manage to break His heart before we had done with Him. In His time that happened which we should naturally expect to happen. His life became a tragedy; men misunderstood it; they could not believe in the disinterestedness of Jesus. He disappointed them, disturbed their self-complacency, wounded their self-love. So in the end they determined to get rid of Him by killing Him. But that did not get rid of Him; quite the contrary: He became a greater power than ever, and the power of the name of Jesus goes on increasing in the world

to-day. Why has this been so, and what does it teach? How is it that the crucifixion of Jesus did not put an end to His work and influence in the world, as His enemies thought it would? Our text gives us the reason. It was because that life was the expression of the will and the very nature of God; it was because it was lived in accordance with the mind and heart of God, and therefore death and evil had no power in the long run to hinder or destroy it. That life was a sublime expression and a supreme demonstration of the power of good over evil, light over darkness, truth over falsehood. It showed men that the noblest kind of life is after all invincible. This was the first and great thing which Jesus did for mankind.

But this is not all; it was only the beginning. The next thing to be demonstrated was that the same spirit that was in Jesus and governed His whole career on earth was the spirit of the true humanity: "The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." The spirit of Jesus was thus the spirit of Christ — Christ as Paul meant it — the ideal or Divine manhood as it exists eternally in God. But that ideal or Divine manhood is also in every soul of man that cometh into the world. It is potentially present in every one who is now listening to me. What needs to be done is to get it manifested or brought out into conscious activity. Wherefore the next great thing that Jesus did for mankind was to show us ourselves as we ought to be. If we try

to live our lives as Jesus lived His, we shall find that the same spirit of power is with us in doing it; every one of us shall be able to say with our Lord, "Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God; yea, Thy law is within my heart." This is the real work which Jesus has done for the world. He has shown us our own Christhood, and made us believe in the possibility of realising it. This was and is the will of God for men. And so, to speak of Jesus as having paid some mysterious penalty for us in the unseen is not only untrue, but even morally mischievous, for it draws attention away from the essential truth, which is that all human life is of the same quality as His, a manifestation of God.

I wish to speak very gently and reverently about any cherished form of belief, however mistaken, but I cannot pretend to misunderstand or ignore this one.

A feeble staff I would not break,  
A feeble faith I would not shake,  
Or even rashly pluck away  
The terror that some truth may stay,  
Whose loss might leave the soul without  
A shield against the shafts of doubt.

But often when I have heard men discussing the atoning work of Jesus I have asked them to tell me precisely what they suppose Him to have effected in the unseen and upon the mind of God by His death on Calvary. As a rule, the person interrogated takes refuge in such statements as, "The

mystery of the Cross," and so on. He finds it impossible to state in plain language, such as you business men want in business things, exactly what he means. Only this very morning I have received a pamphlet containing an address delivered to a representative body of Christian ministers and others, in which we are warned not to expect to be able to explain the sacrifice of Christ, because it is beyond all explanation. But somehow, my friends, I do not think it is. I think the explanation is at once simple and sublime. I believe I could get a child to understand it. I have tried to show you that the thought of the Old Testament writer of my text really was a declaration of the principle that the forthgiving of the spirit of Christ is at once the expression of the will of God and the ministration of more abundant life to mankind, and when Apollos makes use of that Old Testament passage he is thinking all the time of the true inwardness, the moral and spiritual value of the redeeming work of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Now apply this to yourselves. Prejudge nothing, take nothing for granted; see how it works in your everyday concerns. Let the beautiful truth of my text be its own explanation, and look at your lives in the light of it. Let me give you an example of what I mean. A considerable time ago I heard of a case of the following kind: Two sisters and a brother enjoyed a little patrimony between them, the sisters allowing their brother full control of their

property. Somehow the young man became tempted to speculate, and was gradually led on to more and more hazardous ventures, without telling his sisters what he was doing. Presently, the crash came, and they found themselves penniless. The wrongdoer, who was of a reserved disposition, said very little in apology or extenuation of his conduct, yet he suffered greatly from depression and the pangs of self-reproach. His brave and loyal sisters guessed what was passing in his mind, and did everything in their power to show him that they cared for him as much as ever. The subject of the family misfortune was scarcely ever alluded to. When the inevitable privation came they shared it together without murmuring or discontent. One day, after the light had begun to shine again a little, the brother broke silence, and with considerable emotion told his sisters that their unselfish affection had saved him. If, he said, they had ever reproached him for his selfish folly, he would have put an end to his life, but instead of that they had led him to see and choose the better part, not so much by what they said as by what they did. They did not talk religion at him; they lived the principle of the Cross in his presence. They had drawn forth the better manhood by the Christ-like spirit they had shown in suffering for his faults. Here on a small scale is the very thing declared in my text; it is a limited expression of what Jesus has done for the world. We do not need even to say that it is something like

it; it is the working of the self-same spirit, it is the application of the principle of the Cross. These brave and good women bore the Cross for their brother, and now as in all the yesterdays of history the Cross has power to win moral victory in your life and mine. This beautiful thing, this atoning love, this spirit of Jesus, needs to be manifested more and more every day and hour. It is the kind of doctrine that everybody can understand, and the only one that the world needs.

Twice within the last week a number of the poorest crippled children in this district have been entertained in the hall below the City Temple. I am told it was wonderful to see the compassionate goodwill with which the workers came to help on that occasion. Besides City Temple workers there came some music-hall artistes to amuse the children with songs and recitations. In the joy and pathos of that hour they had a not unimportant share. They came for nothing, of course, except the desire to help and heal. I have little doubt that those music-hall people would have been considerably astonished if some one had told them that they were first-rate theologians, and that what they were doing was mentioned in the Bible; and yet it was so. The songs they sang to the children were certainly not as beautiful as the fortieth Psalm, but they were akin to that Psalm in spirit and purpose. These singers came to brighten poor suffering lives, and in so doing they were manifesting something of



the spirit of Christ and helping to lift the world up to God. Do not tell me that this has nothing to do with Calvary; it has everything to do with it. I do not know what the world might have been if Jesus had never come; but the fact that He has come has meant the inpouring of the spirit of self-sacrifice into the life of mankind in such a way as could never have been without Him. By the way, during one of the little meetings to which I have referred it was determined to send a telegram of greeting to the Lord Mayor from the children. Then followed a pathetic scene which drew tears from the eyes of the spectators. When the proposal to send the telegram was made from the platform it was received with quavering cheers by these poor little guests of Jesus. They knew who their friend was, and in acting thus they were adoring the spirit of Christ in the Lord Mayor of London.

Sir William Treloar will not receive a worthier tribute than that in all his year of office, and I hope he never wants a greater. It was a great thing to be cheered by the sick, the maimed, the halt, and the blind. Blessed be God, while theologians are writing learned disquisitions on the Atonement, here it is in the midst of us.

Let us go home and practise the Atonement, the making-one of God and man. Just as the Psalmist meant himself when he wrote my text, and Apollos meant Christ, so I mean *you* and Christ, Christ in *you*. Ritual and dogma do not matter: "Sacrifice

and offering Thou wouldest not; then said I, Lo I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God. Yea, Thy law is within my heart." You fathers and mothers, go and set the Atonement to work in your children; you business men, give it a chance with those you employ, or who employ you. Never tell me you do not believe it: you do; everybody does. You burden-bearers and way-makers, whose lot is cast in obscure places, let it shine through your life. Never mind the scale on which the life is lived. The scale on which the earthly life of Jesus was lived was not so very big after all. There is nothing small but selfishness; there is nothing great but love.

## A LOVE THAT DIED

“He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.”—JOHN xiii. 18.

THIS pathetic saying of Jesus is, as perhaps you may have observed during the reading of the lesson, a quotation from the forty-first Psalm. It has a special appropriateness to the experience of Jesus as described in this chapter and the parallel accounts in the synoptical gospels. As it stands it is peculiar to the fourth gospel, but I think we may fairly regard this as one of the few instances in which this particular gospel is more historical than the others. For the most part, as you know, the fourth gospel does not aim at historical accuracy, but at spiritual instruction. The writer takes up the historical material supplied by the others and uses it for his own special purpose, along with some other materials which are not historical at all, but merely symbolical. Notwithstanding this, however, I think we can perceive a genuine historical element in this book which is not to be found in other parts of the New Testament. I like to think that this particular element represents the special contribution of the Apostle John. I do not mean that he wrote it,

but that the writer of this book, who belonged to the Johannine school, was acquainted with many of the things which John used to tell his followers concerning his beloved Master. It is from this source, as I think, that we have the peculiar vividness and intimacy of the record of the last scenes in the upper room before the betrayal of Jesus. If I am right in this hypothesis, it is fair to assume that our text represents something which Jesus actually said. If so, this is the best and fullest account we have of the matter, and enables us to picture the scene with comparative ease. Of those who were present at the last supper, John would be most likely to know exactly what went on, for no doubt his place at table was immediately on the right of his Master, while that of Judas was on the left. This is borne out by the details given in this chapter. We are told that the disciple whom Jesus loved leaned on his Master's breast at supper, a fact which is easily understandable when we remember that the custom at such a meal was for the partakers to recline on their left elbow and use the right hand for dipping in the dish. The whole story is told so vividly and with such fullness of detail that we are practically forced to believe that we have here the testimony of an eye-witness, and an eye-witness who must have been quite close to Jesus, so close as to be able to catch even His asides. The others gospels confirm the account given here, but they do not present it with such striking detail.

Let us look for a moment at the circumstances as narrated.

First we are told about the foot-washing, an acted parable of great impressiveness. It was after this ceremony that the little company took their places at table. From what I have just said, it will readily be seen that the head of John would almost touch the breast of Jesus, and that he could lean upon Him if he wished, as no doubt he did wish, for the attitude would be quite natural as a demonstration of affection. But it is a striking thing that Jesus could do the same to Judas, and that, in fact, it was hardly possible for the Master to avoid the breast of His betrayer. According to all the gospels, Jesus made the announcement of the coming betrayal during the progress of the meal, and in such a way as to attract general attention. John alone tells us that Jesus Himself was troubled in spirit at the time, and that the sorrow in His own heart at once communicated itself to the rest. Simon Peter motioned to John to ask the Master to say who the betrayer was. No other gospel records the answer, so we may suppose it to have been given in a low voice which would reach John's ear alone: "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it." This is a very realistic touch, and one which incidentally shows the relevance of our text. The handing of a sop in this way was an act of courtesy often performed at an Oriental meal, and Judas was the only one to whom Jesus could conveniently

show this little kindness — that is, supposing Judas to have been immediately on His left. What a tumult of emotions must have been raging in the breast of the betrayer at this moment! John tells us that after the sop “Satan entered into him.” There is a world of suggestion here. The offering of the sop was Jesus’ mute and last appeal to a false friend, and the appeal was made in vain. Probably no one else at table was able to see the significance of the action or to note the quiet solemnity with which Jesus added, “That thou doest, do quickly.”

The psychology of the downfall of Judas would be interesting if we could know it all. But there is some part of it which I think we can see pretty plainly. Has it ever occurred to you to ask why Judas thought of betraying his Master? Why should he ever have joined Him at all if this was to be the end of it? What influences were at work to produce such a change in their relationship? We have no means of knowing the story in full, but there is some ground for believing that in the main it was as follows. Judas was the only one of the apostolic band who belonged to Judæa instead of to Galilee. There is some ground for believing that he was the son of a Pharisee, and therefore must have had associations with the Jerusalem party which had now turned so strongly against Jesus and sought His death. Judas joined Jesus at first because, in common with many of the Phari-

sees — who were zealous patriots and hated the Roman power — he hoped that Jesus might prove to be the national leader against the foreigner. He could not understand any other kind of Messiahship, and therefore, like all the zealots of Jerusalem, he became disappointed and angry when he found that Jesus had no intention of fulfilling their hopes. The Pharisaic party had now determined to get rid of Jesus, but it was highly desirable to get Him into their power quietly and secretly, for fear of the mob. If once He were helpless in their hands there would be little to fear from His supporters afterwards. With this purpose in view they brought pressure to bear upon Judas, the only one of the apostolic band through whom they could hope to effect anything. We may reasonably infer that the father of Judas was amongst those who urged him to betray the Master and pointed out the advantages of so doing. They would insist that Jesus was only a weak impostor after all, a vague dreamer from whom no practical good could be expected. They would tell Judas that to help to get Jesus out of the way would be in reality a meritorious and patriotic action. Add to this the fact that by this time Judas had begun to give way to covetousness and dishonesty, and you have a pretty satisfactory explanation of his subsequent conduct. He saw that Jesus suspected him, and he felt uneasy in His presence. There is nothing much more irritating to the man who is living a false life than the con-

sciousness that some pure soul sees through him. It will either break him down in shame and remorse, or it will render him hard and desperate. This was well illustrated some time ago in Mr. Vincent Brown's powerful novel, "A Magdalen's Husband." In this book we have the moral problem suggested by the behaviour of Judas worked out in a dramatic fashion. The central characters are a noble wife who had been rescued from a life of sin, and her mean-spirited and cruel husband, who felt his moral inferiority to her so keenly that he both loved and hated her at the same time. More than once he was almost on the point of flinging himself at her feet and acknowledging his own foulness as compared with her purity, but he did not do it, and the end was tragedy.

Here was just the relation in which Judas stood to Jesus. There is no reason to believe that when he first joined himself to the Galilean Teacher his intentions were other than right, so far as he saw the right. It was hardly possible for him to be long in the company of Jesus without recognising the moral loftiness and spiritual greatness of the Master. He had either to rise towards these or sink lower because of them. Contact with Jesus would make him either better or worse. If he did not respond to the ideal thus presented, he must reject it, and the result would thus be a process of deterioration. This was just what happened. Judas had either to rise higher or sink lower, and he chose the latter



without confessing it even to himself. He hardened his heart against Jesus, while all the time telling himself that he was doing so because Jesus had failed the patriotic expectations and the religious ideals of the leaders of the nation. The crisis was reached in the upper room. Like the blackguardly husband in Vincent Brown's story, Judas probably felt for a moment, especially after the foot-washing, an almost overpowering desire to fling himself at His master's feet and tell Him everything. But the moment passed; his sullen resolve returned, and when Jesus made His dramatic announcement, "One of you shall betray me," he was able to look Him in the face with comparative calmness and ask the wicked and hypocritical question, "Lord, is it I?" As Jesus handed him the sop their eyes met, and both understood each other. As John puts it, Satan entered into Judas. The look with which he answered Jesus was one of sinister avowal, and Jesus read it rightly. "That thou doest, do quickly," He said, and Judas rose immediately and left the room. Jesus did not explain to the rest. It was no use alarming them; they were in no danger. He, and He only, was the victim. The friend and companion of the early and hopeful days of His ministry had gone forth to sell His blood. Yes, the Scripture was terribly fulfilled, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

We can see now why this Old Testament saying came home to Jesus with such poignancy. It was

because the sop he had offered to Judas had only served to arouse the devil in him and precipitate the tragedy. The Revised Version puts the situation even more strongly than the Authorised. It is, "He that eateth *my* bread." There are many ways in which this saying is seen to be singularly appropriate to the downfall of Judas. For one thing, it was generally held that to accept a man's hospitality while plotting mischief against him was one of the basest of actions. To eat the same bread was symbolical of close friendship. We cannot be sure who wrote the forty-first Psalm, but it is said to be a lament of Jeremiah over the conduct of some who by the ties of honour and friendship ought to have stood by him in his time of stress and danger, and did not. This is a not uncommon experience in the world's history, and is one of the saddest and bitterest through which any human being can be called to pass. There is no bereavement so dreadful as that which follows from the death of love in the heart of a friend. I dare say there is more than one present this morning who could corroborate that statement. In the upper room Jesus realised how true it was, and perhaps He knew a little more of the meaning of the Old Testament original than we do now. He may have known a good deal of the life history of the great prophet who found himself deserted by his friend at the crisis of his career. If so, He must also have known one beautiful thing which did something to relieve the sombreness of

that ancient story. Jeremiah had at least one friend who stood by him, although not strong enough to do much for him. This friend was Baruch, the brave, humble man who lived to become Jeremiah's biographer, and to whom we owe most that we know about the prophet. There may have been other friends too, but, whether or no, there was Baruch. The Baruch of Jesus at this moment was John. There were others, to be sure — poor, timid, loving, childlike Galileans who revered Him above every other being on earth. There were a few women, too, who did not run away when the evil came. But, in spite of these comforting considerations, you can understand the sadness of the heart of Jesus as He thought of His failure with Judas. It was not bread alone that He had given to Judas; He had given Himself without stint. He had broken to him freely of the bread of life. Remember, Judas was not merely His follower, but His friend, a friend with whom He had shared His deepest soul. I do not believe for a moment in the nonsensical position that Jesus knew from the first what the end of His friendship with Judas would be. He did not. He trusted him fully, and looked upon him in the same way as He did upon the others, until it became evident that Judas was false. If Jesus had not felt this as a heavy blow there would have been something unreal about the whole experience. He did feel it, felt it keenly, even with anguish. John says He was troubled in spirit, and well He might be,

for He had just buried a friend in the deepest grave that treachery ever dug.

I have no desire to detain you long in applying to our own lives the lesson of this study from the life of Jesus, but I wish to point out that exactly the same situation may arise in the experience of any child of God, and that the consolation of Jesus is ours too. Let me show you what I mean.

Is there some one here this morning who knows that extremity of suffering, the suffering of giving your best and doing your best for one whom at first you thought worthy but now know to be false? This is one of the hardest and most inexplicable things that can ever torture the human soul. For a while you know the joy of a true friendship or a love so great and pure that it seems Divine. Then, little by little, you see the deterioration setting in, the breakdown of a soul. The greater your love before, the greater your agony now. You wonder whether you ever knew your friend at all, or whether your faith in him was but "the baseless fabric of a dream." It shakes your confidence in life to find that the human heart can change in this way. One would think that in God's universe such a thing would never be possible — once a friend, always a friend. But, alas! it is possible. The case becomes worse when you have made your friend the possessor of your soul, only to find that he can take it and wring it, as Judas wrung the soul of Jesus when he bargained with the Pharisees for His blood. Many

fine theological theories have been spun about the agony of Jesus in Gethsemane. If you will only try to put yourself in the sufferer's place you will know of a certainty that one part of that agony, and not the least part of it, a very human part, was His mourning over the friend who had betrayed Him and the thought of the love that was dead.

While I was away in Cornwall I came across a deserted cottage, a mere cabin, standing alone on a wild moor. It was the most desolate-looking object in the whole landscape. The roof was stripped away, the rafters hung broken and dilapidated, and the windows were gone. But the most pathetic thing of all was the ashes on the hearth-stone, the tiny remains of what had once been the domestic fire. Here was a picture of many a human experience. There is nothing much sadder. You admit a man or a woman to the inner sanctuary of your being, the hearth-stone of your soul, and there you kindle the fire of a sacred friendship, only to find that the ashes are left in the ruined fabric of your hopes at last.

I have a room whereinto no one enters  
Save I myself alone;  
There sits a blessed memory on a throne,  
There my life centres.

If any should force entrance he might see there  
One buried, yet not dead,  
Before whose face I no more bow my head,  
Or bend my knee there.

If this should be the experience of any of you — and I dare say it is so to some extent with a good many — I want you to take a good look at Jesus on the eve of Calvary. You could not learn a better lesson for Passion week. There is no man among you who may not need it some day, even if you do not need it now. Observe that Jesus said not one reproachful word of Judas, although His solemn words of pity were dreadful in their intensity. His own love was not dead, whether that of Judas was or not. Did He ever pray for him again? Yes, I think He did. We do not know all Jesus said in Gethsemane. If He came out of the upper room troubled in spirit because of Judas, He took the thought of Judas with Him when He went to ask His heavenly Father to spare Him the last dreadful ordeal, in which the kiss of Judas was not the least dreadful part. And whether he prayed for Judas in Gethsemane, He certainly did on Calvary. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," included Judas — Judas most of all perhaps.

I do not think that prayer was a failure. It could not be a failure. God has more worlds than one in which to work out the mighty scheme of redemption. The love which Judas bore his Master died in his own selfishness. But we may trust that somewhere and somehow the spirit of Christ, the spirit of suffering love, gave it resurrection. If any of you have come to a Calvary caused by the Judas spirit in any of its thousand forms, take care that

you meet it as Jesus did, for if you do you are already master of the worst that evil can inflict, and you have followed and attacked it in the very soul that has caused your pain. Trust God for all the rest. Life is far larger than the peep you get at it here on earth; but even though you track it through a million universes, you will never find it to be anything less than love. No tomb can bury love for ever, for love is God.

## THE SON OF PERDITION

“While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name; those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.” — JOHN xvii. 12.

THIS is one of the hard sayings of the New Testament, and all the more so because it is put into the mouth of Jesus. One of the most pathetic and apparently hopeless things in the gospel narratives is the tragic fate of Judas. I do not mean merely the way in which the betrayer of Jesus put an end to his own life; I mean the moral dereliction implied in it. Judas began well and ended miserably, and the New Testament writers are silent in regard to the possibility — even the remote possibility — of a recovery for this lost soul. There is no suggestion of sympathy or pity for him. In the Acts of the Apostles Peter is represented as describing his end, but, so far as we can discern from the printed page, there is no trace of commiseration for the poor lapsed apostle who had chosen such a dreadful doom. I do not think that either Peter or the apostolic band could really be callous in such a matter. It would hardly be fitting, considering their own behaviour, especially that of Peter himself, on the night when



Jesus was arrested. Besides, I suppose men at that time must have been something like what men are now; and, if so, they could hardly have viewed the fall of a comrade in such a way as to retain for him no feeling save that of detestation. They must have mourned over him, and all the more so because they had fallen themselves.

But what are we to suppose was the real attitude of Jesus in the matter? This is a crucial question, and one in which I want to arrive at the truth if it be possible to find it. In a sermon on the Thursday before Good Friday I gave to you as careful a psychological analysis of the relations of Jesus and Judas as was possible in the time at our disposal. I think we then saw reason to suppose that Jesus was very far indeed from being indifferent as to what might happen to Judas, or through Judas to Himself. If I interpret the situation rightly, no small part of His mental agony afterwards in Gethsemane was caused by the trouble He felt at the base and wicked conduct of one who had once been His friend. How bitterly the words of the forty-first Psalm must have come home to him as He quoted them at the supper-table! "He that eateth my bread hath lifted up his heel against me." Here is one of those suggestive little touches which help to reveal to us the human pathos and intensity of the last hours of the earthly ministry of Jesus. When, with this scene in mind, we read the words of our text, they must necessarily sound very stern

and even terrible. They do not seem to contain a scintilla of hope for Judas; and, what is more, they do not at first sight seem to exhibit the smallest compassion for him. The betrayer has chosen his course; Jesus pronounces a woe upon him, and that is all.

But is it all? I think not, and I think too that I can see good reason why not. I should like you to understand before we go any further that in selecting this subject this morning I am not influenced merely by its intrinsic interest or its psychological subtlety; I have deliberately chosen it because I believe it bears immediately and strongly upon the experience of a good many who are present this morning. You will see what I mean when we come to apply it. Let me assure you, too, that in dealing with it I have not the smallest desire to juggle with the words of Scripture in order to make out a case for mercy in this one specific instance. What I shall hope to show you is that there is a better way of stating the case than by appealing to the letter of Scripture. The case of Judas is by no means an isolated one, and if it were not for the special horror traditionally attaching to the supposition that to betray Jesus was immeasurably worse than to betray any one else, we should see this. Perhaps when we look into the matter we shall find that Judas was not so very much worse than ourselves. Perhaps, too, we shall realise that the failure of Jesus in his case has had its parallels since, and that something is to

be said for the view that that failure was not so absolute as appears on the surface. In the long run such a spirit as that of Jesus must know itself victorious over the worst that human baseness can do, and its triumph will not be revenge, but the recovery of the lost to the fellowship of love.

Now let us scrutinise this passage for a moment. It may be that in its present form it did not proceed from the lips of Jesus. But, as I have previously tried to show, there is a considerable element in these upper room discourses which apparently could only have come from the testimony of one who was there and heard them. The writer of this gospel has worked up this oral tradition, in accordance with his method, in such a way as to set forth clearly and emphatically the particular spiritual truth he has in view. He wants us to realise that the glorified Christ is the very life of those who are trying to live for God on earth. His main object is to insist upon the value of this mystic union between the individual soul and the eternal Christ. Do not forget this, for it is important. Nevertheless, I am sure I can see here the record of a very tender and beautiful episode which probably represents what the Apostle John must have told his disciples over and over again concerning the last scenes in the upper room. I do not mean that John wrote it. You remember, no doubt, that this is the only gospel which gives minutely and in vivid detail the situation at the table when Jesus accused Judas of intending

to betray Him. John — and I think it must be John — describes the pathetic appeal of the Master to the betrayer in the offering of the sop. He tells us that Jesus was “troubled in spirit.” How natural! How indisputably true! He tells us of the quiet way in which the Master, reading accurately the sullen defiance in the eyes of Judas, bids him go and get his hellish work over as quickly as possible. Then came the beautiful parting words contained in the fourteenth chapter, followed by the prayer in the seventeenth. It is not likely that John would remember the exact words of this prayer, but such a prayer there must have been; the occasion called for it; and Jesus knew He was saying good-bye. Some of the phrases in this prayer would remain for ever in the minds of those who heard it. The sad intensity of Jesus at the moment would be enough to make it so. Is it likely that Judas would occupy no place in His imagination under the circumstances? While this prayer was being prayed the fallen one was on his way to fetch the murderers. Jesus knew it; John knew it, if the account given in this gospel be correct. No one else knew it. If Jesus said anything about Judas, John would remember it for certain. The words of our text may not exactly reproduce what Jesus said and John remembered, but in spirit they cannot be far removed from the original.

“Not one of them is lost but the son of perdition.” How hard it sounds! Is it really so very hard?

I wish we had some way of reproducing the exact force of the Greek original, and I think you would find that the saying is very far from being hard; it is the mournful plaint of wounded love, the dirge of a friendship. It is even more than this, unless I am utterly mistaken; it is actually a prayer, a prayer prayed in the shadow of failure, a prayer from which hope has well-nigh gone, but still a prayer. The nearest approach I can give you to the spirit of the original is to ask you to dismiss from your minds the ugly word "perdition," and substitute for it the simple word "lost." The reason why I suggest this is that the word translated "lost" in the former part of the sentence is from the same root as the word translated "perdition" in the second. Just see what a difference this makes. "None of them is lost, but the child of loss," or, "the lost child." This is actually the translation which is given in Luther's German Bible, "the lost child." I do not wish to press this too far. It is quite probable that the phrase, "the son of destruction," was proverbial among the Jews to describe any case of moral ruin. But what I should like to insist upon here is that the words do not carry with them any sinister suggestion of inexorable reprobation. Jesus was not tearing Judas out of His heart when He prayed this prayer; He was just lamenting over His friend and telling His Father about the sorrow. Try to put yourself in His place. Remember what had gone before

— His pathetic appeal to the betrayer, His trouble of heart when He saw what Judas meant to do — and you will realise the spirit in which He prayed. How would you have felt under like circumstances? You would feel intensely the horror of it all, and the more you had loved your friend the more certain you would be to lift your burdened heart to God in prayer about the terrible thing which had come to pass. Jesus went on praying for the rest, but He could not forbear interpolating the cry, “There is a lost child! I have lost none save that one, but, oh! the heartbreak of it! There is one lost child.” The allusion which immediately follows, “That the Scripture might be fulfilled,” is only a reference to the passage already quoted from the forty-first Psalm, “He that eateth my bread hath lifted up his heel against me.” The translators have given another reference in the margin, but they are wrong; the only one we are justified in giving is the one which Jesus Himself had already employed. The Scripture was fulfilled just in the same way as many a proverb is fulfilled in modern experience. A few nights ago I happened to be quoting Chaucer’s well-known lines:

If thou be poor, thy brother hateth thee,  
And all thy friendes flee from thee, alas!

Some one present instantly remarked, “Ah, how frequently that is true!” This was just the spirit in which Jesus made His reference to Scripture.

How sadly true that the friend of happier and more hopeful days had now become His enemy ! He did not mean, and could not mean, that the Scripture had literally foretold this particular betrayal, and that it had had to come about by a sort of fatalism.

We can see at once, too, what was the kind of loss alluded to here. It was the loss of a friend, involving as it did the loss of a soul, of which Jesus was thinking. There was no suggestion of a perdition in the modern sense. The only thing that troubled Jesus was that Judas—who was still alive, remember !—had become not only a traitor, but a degraded soul. He had falsified the expectations of his Friend and Master ; he had fallen from a position that promised much. As I have said before, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Judas when first he joined himself to Jesus. He really meant it ; and no doubt he had caught something of the enthusiasm of the young Israel of his day, who hoped that the kingdom of heaven, prophesied by the Baptist, was now really at hand, and that Jesus, this wonderful Jesus, whom he loved and admired so much, would prove to be the divinely appointed means of realising it. He did not think that now ; his early enthusiasm was dead, and, under the influence of his Pharisaic connections, he had consented to hand Jesus over to their cruel power. I hardly think it possible that he foresaw the tragic ending of that betrayal ; and one thing at least is certain—he was capable of remorse,

which shows he was not entirely dead to better feeling. Judas was the dupe of the Pharisees, and the scheming priests were greater criminals than he. If he had been utterly bad Jesus would have seen through him at first; and the fact that He did not do so, but actually chose him as a member of the apostolic band, is proof positive that Judas must have possessed and exhibited a certain promise of good. We can see now why Jesus named him in this valedictory prayer with such anguish of spirit. Here was a friend gone wrong; here was a golden morning swallowed up in a midnight of sorrow and shame.

And was this prayer in vain? Was this the last word about Judas? Was all the friendship, all the solicitude of Jesus, wasted upon this man? Did all the sweet fellowship of previous days go for nothing? I cannot think so; it is impossible to think so, even if Scripture is silent upon the point. If such a failure were possible on the part of Jesus, then some of you who are listening to me at this moment will never know the balm of healing for one of the greatest sorrows that the human heart can know, the loss in life of those who are dearer to you than life itself. Will you in this connection allow me to read a few sentences from a letter written to me by a man of culture and spirituality who comes to the City Temple sometimes? "Let us suppose Jesus had not died when He did, and had loved Judas; had been treacherously wronged by him, yet yearned over him with a love that could not change. There



are many, many, in this dark world, besides the often-cited mother praying for the erring son, who are tempted to say, 'Of what avail is prayer for another?' and, if of no avail, then intercessory prayer, so it seems to me, is just so much superfluous expenditure of emotion."

I do not know whether there is a personal experience indicated here, but I am quite certain there must be some present who are not strangers to what is described. Some of you have played the part of Judas; others have suffered from the treachery of Judas, but, like Jesus, have loved sincerely and suffered in proportion to the greatness of the love. What you want to know is whether the prayer of Jesus was fruitless. I repeat that the behaviour of Judas can be paralleled over and over again in human experience. Judas did not know Jesus as Christians know Him now. All that Judas saw in Jesus was very much what you and I see in the best and noblest man of our acquaintance. When he betrayed Jesus he did not consciously betray the Lord of life and glory; in a sense he did worse—he broke the heart of his friend and benefactor, he trampled upon the noblest soul he had ever known. Have you ever done that? If so you have been guilty of the crime of Judas, neither more nor less. If for reasons too base and selfish to acknowledge even to yourself you have ever nailed a beautiful love on a cross, you are a Judas; if there is no hope for him there is no hope for you. To crucify the

Lord of Glory, knowing what you are doing, would not be so bad as to crucify a tender human love that had nothing to offer you but itself. To defy the God of Heaven would not be so great a sin as to crush and destroy some poor child of innocence who loved and trusted you more than you are worth. Talk about sin against God ! Men do not commonly shake their fist in God's face ; that would be the act of a madman. What they do is to take advantage of human weakness and unselfishness, and crush the joy out of it. This is what Judas did, and this is what we do. If Judas had seen Jesus as Christian experience sees Him now, he would not have dared to betray Him ; he betrayed Him because he thought He was weaker than Caiaphas. He was wrong, of course ; calculating self-interest is always wrong. But he was no more wrong in his reckoning than you are in yours if you have been playing the part of a Judas. You are a Judas if your ingratitude or worldliness has brought a father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. You are a Judas if you have shadowed some good woman's life so that in her anguish she wishes she had never known you, and rues the day she was born. You are a Judas if, instead of a protector, your child has found in you a bad example, an influence overshadowing his whole career. You are a Judas if you have ever stabbed a friend in the back or failed him in his hour of trial. You are a Judas if you have ever repaid generosity with ingratitude, self-sacrifice

with self-interest, loving solicitude with indifference or cold forgetfulness. Understand that there is no getting round the subject by pleading that you have never betrayed Jesus, the life and light of the world. Yes, you have; you have betrayed Jesus wherever and whenever you have betrayed innocent blood for your own wicked ends. You have betrayed Jesus when you have betrayed love in any form. Make no excuses; face the facts. You are a son of perdition in the very sense in which that phrase is employed in my text. Whether there is a hell beyond the tomb or not, you will have to reckon with hell somewhere, just as Judas did. When Jesus uttered the lament contained in these words He was not thinking of hell, but of the living Judas, who was even then living the life of hell and doing the deeds of hell. That man was a lost soul, lost to purity and nobleness, lost to generous aims, lost to the very things which at first had charmed and drawn him in the spirit and character of Jesus.

But there is another side to all this. If I could find Judas in this place this morning, no doubt I could find the experience of Jesus too. Is there any one here who knows what it is to suffer at the hands of one for whom you would willingly give all you possess, even life itself? Do you know a son of perdition, a lost child, as Jesus calls him, without whom heaven would be no heaven to you? Has any one robbed you of your hope in life, yet without killing your regard for him? Have you ever been

bitterly disappointed in man or woman while still continuing to feel that life holds no higher object for you than that of saving them from what they are? Do you remember that awful shock wherewith you discovered the utter hollowness and faithlessness of the friend wherein you trusted? Perhaps you have never got over the dreadfulness of that experience, the discovery that what you took for truth was but a cruel lie. And yet your soul goes on clinging to him or her who has thus opened the floodgates of sorrow upon you. Somehow in this world we do not commonly love those best who have done the most for us; often enough we love those best who have caused us the most pain. I dare say you all know how true that is. Well now, if there be any one here who is praying the prayer of anguished love for a son of perdition, I want to put your hand in that of Jesus, and to help you to feel the power of His spirit in your prayer. "A lost child!" A lost friend! What infinite pathos in the phrase! And yet Jesus must afterwards have come to know that nothing is ever lost, and no good is ever wasted in God's wide universe. One thing that this generation needs to learn is that there is no stopping place for redeeming love, either on this side of death or on the other, short of absolute victory. Love will pursue its object into the jaws of hell. Let every widowed heart take courage. All love is divine, and therefore eternal; nothing else is eternal, and therefore love is the last word in the relations of

man and God or man and man. All love is from and towards the infinite reality, and cannot miss its goal. There is no waste and there is no failure, for love is God.

In Derbyshire there is a strange underground river in a place called Speedwell Mine. I dare say you have all heard of it. It follows a mysterious course, running along under the surface of the earth for three-quarters of a mile or so, and then plunging straight down into a yawning abyss, in which it appears to be utterly swallowed up. No one has yet been able to find an outlet for that river, but every one knows that, whether underground or above ground, it must ultimately reach the ocean. That volume of water can never be wasted; it must obey the law of its own being and make for its source in the mighty deep. If it had been a mere trickling rill it might have been lost on the way, but, thanks to all the streamlets which have flowed down into that Derbyshire dale to swell its volume, that is impossible. It is too great to be lost, and the larger the number of the streamlets that pour down from the hills, and plunge into the abyss along with it, the swifter and more certain will be its rush for the distant sea, even though no human eye may ever behold the confluence at last.

Here is a symbol of the prayer of baffled love reaching even beyond death. No intercession is ever made in vain. No life ever pours itself out for any other either in deed or word without thrusting it

upon God. He for whom you agonise and strive may plunge into the dark abyss of moral failure and hardness of soul, but that is not the end. Let your love plunge there too and reinforce the good that is never wholly absent from any human soul, however sunken in evil. How can that descent of love ever fail? It came from God, and unto God it must return. Here its portion may be failure and ignominy, but in the full ocean of eternal love we shall know that the failure was never more than relative. Just as certain as it is that no sin ever goes unpunished, so no love ever goes without its reward. Whatever else is true, that is true. Trust it for all in all.

## THE MISTAKE OF SIN

“What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.”—ROM. vi. 21.

THIS question and answer shed a flood of light upon what we may call the psychology of sin. It tells us a great deal about the underlying motive leading to sin, and points out in the plainest terms that the results are disappointing. The sinner aims at one thing, and gets another; he tries for life, and finds death.

This statement is illustrated in the context by a reference to characteristic sins of the Romans to whom Paul was writing. At this time the imperial city was entering upon the period of internal decay, which showed itself first in an inordinate love of luxury and fleshly indulgence. Perhaps the majority of those to whom Paul addressed this epistle were Jewish Christians resident in Rome, but no doubt there were some among them belonging to other races, and all of them would be more or less familiar with the more scandalous vices of the time and place. Not a few of them, probably, had themselves been addicted to these vices before their conversion. Paul now appeals to their past experience.

He asks what they had gained by their self-indulgence, and himself supplies the answer — death. By implication, as you see, he suggests that they must originally have expected something different, if they thought about the matter at all. At any rate, when they yielded themselves to sin they had not deliberately and of set purpose chosen death. By “death” he means, no doubt, a physical fact and its moral analogy. You all know the case he has in mind. If a man takes to drink or sensuality the results show before long in a poisoning or putrefaction of the physical frame. He becomes loathsome, debilitated, brutish — the outer man is dying. As a matter of fact, his behaviour does shorten his life; “the end of these things is death.”

But this is not all. Along with the physical there goes a moral deterioration too. You have only to look at the man to see it. The marks of dissipation in any human face are always the signs of the death of finer instincts and nobler feelings. What was at first done with uneasiness under the protest of conscience becomes in time the natural habit; the best is dying or dead. I suppose we all know of melancholy instances in which Paul’s words are seen to be only too true to-day. In addition to the death of this better self, too, there is a death of joy. The very gratification which the sinner seeks by his wrongdoing fails him in the end; he cannot keep it long. This is the experience to which Paul appeals in our text. “Well,” he says in effect, “you have had your



fling. You have gratified your selfish, baser instincts. What was it worth? What has it brought you? Would you not all say that in every sense of the word the end of those things is death?"

It seems to me that we have here an excellent and suggestive analysis of the universal experience of mankind in regard to sin. Sin and death imply each other, just as love and life imply each other; and yet sin always begins as a bid for life. I dare say you all know a much-quoted and much-maligned sentence of mine, that sin is a blundering quest for God. Those who are horrified, or pretend to be horrified, by that saying usually leave out the word "blundering" in order to make it appear as black as possible. And yet that statement is the simple truth, and is implied in this very text. I do not mean that sin is an *innocent* quest for anything. I do not mean that the sinner is conscious of seeking God, or indeed of seeking anything other than his own self-gratification; but all the same the thing he really wants, and is trying to get in a selfish way, is the life of God, for there is no other life. All men are seeking this life in everything they do. They cannot stop seeking it, any more than they can stop breathing. Just think for a moment, and you will see how inevitable this is. Every one of us in every activity of our waking hours is engaged in trying to increase his hold upon life, trying to expand his consciousness of life. As Tennyson has it:

Whatever crazy sorrow saith,  
No life that breathes with human breath  
Has ever truly longed for death.

'Tis life whereof our nerves are scant;  
O life, not death, for which we pant;  
More life, and fuller, that I want.

Whether we are working for money or applause, or for some impersonal object, we are all the time seeking more abundant life, and the more successful we are in getting our grasp upon life, the greater is our joy. But you can also see that we are never able to pause in this quest. We may move from one object to another, but we are all the time in pursuit of the infinite reality. Now, what is this infinite reality but God? There is no life that is not God. As Augustine has put it: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." Here, again, was one who knew, for he had tried to find satisfaction in other and lesser ways; Augustine the libertine had to become a Christian before he found what he had been blindly wanting all his life.

Let me tell you why I regard this point as of so much importance. It shows that no man can really do without God. It fills life full of meaning. Show men what they really want in their feverish rush after wealth, fame, honour, and all the material rewards of this world. Tell them they can rest in nothing less than conscious union with Him who is the source

of all abiding joy, and you will explain to them their own cravings. Just think of it ! In all the drudgery of to-morrow ; in all the excitements of the days beyond ; in loss and disappointment ; in the splendour of success ; in our quiet domesticities ; in our fierce conflicts with the world ; in all the ups and downs and ins and outs of life — we are all in want of the same thing, the only reality that can permanently satisfy the soul, and the strange thing is that often enough we do not know it.

Oh, restless hearts, you do not know what you want, but this is it. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God.”

Now here is the melancholy fact concerning sin : the sinner does not know what he wants ; he only thinks he knows. When he seeks a gratification in what he knows to be wrong it is like drinking salt water to quench thirst. There is a voice within him which tells him that selfish gratification is wrong, and that life ought not to be sought in that way. He silences that voice, only to find in the end that the joy of a moment has been purchased at a heavy cost. To seek life selfishly is to lose it. The sinner always knows he is doing wrong. What he does not seem to know is that the end of that wrong-doing is the loss of the very thing he tries to get : he grabs at life and embraces death. Paul knew what he was saying when he appealed to his converts to observe the fruits of a sinful life.

I can imagine that among my congregation at this moment there is some poor fellow who feels that this is not quite an accurate description of his experience. I will suppose him to be a victim of the drug habit. Perhaps he knows well enough that this habit is ruining him body and soul, and causing untold sorrow to other people, but he cannot stop. He will scheme and lie and stoop to the most wicked devices in order to put himself in the power of his enemy. If you ask him whether he knows what he is doing he will tell you he knows perfectly, but that the temporary gratification is worth the terrible price. He will say that he is walking into hell with his eyes open because it feels like heaven for half an hour. Now, I do not wish to insist too strongly upon the moral culpability of such a man as this, but moral culpability there must have been somewhere to begin with: he sailed his boat too near a cataract, and must have known at the time that he was doing something he ought not to do. At present he is only a helpless derelict swept away on a flood he cannot control: we know well enough, and so does he, where that flood is taking him. The essence of sin is self-gratification at the cost of the common good; any form of self-gratification which diminishes your value to mankind is sin. Here is a sin which began in that way: now it is hardly a sin at all; it is rather the terrible harvest which is being reaped from sin. Would any one need to ask whether this sin was a soul's mistake? To be sure

it was. If this poor victim of his own folly had known what the end would be, he never would have entered upon this course, but now he cannot stop. He needs the strong hand of a saviour, and I fervently believe that he can have it. I will say a word about this presently before I close, but I do not wish for the moment to lose sight of the point at issue: every sin is a mistake. Like every other human activity, it is a quest for the one abiding reality of all existence, but it is not an innocent quest. It is a quest made in a selfish way; and it is a mistake, because the sinner has to find out in the long run that a selfish pursuit of life only ends in death.

Perhaps the example just given is not the best that might be adduced, but it is sufficient for my purpose. I have chosen it because it is hardly possible to entertain for such an experience any other feeling than one of pity, and also because the fell result of illicit self gratification is so clear. But take any other sinful deed or course of action, and you will see the same principle at work. What makes a thing wrong? Is there any conceivable deed which is unchangeably wrong in itself? No, there is not. "Sin is not the deed," as Juliana of Norwich used to say. It is the desire to increase one's hold on life at some one else's cost or at the cost of the common good. A sinner may not be consciously disobeying God when he does a selfish thing; he probably is not thinking of God at all, and yet he is actually trying

to appropriate God's own life by snatching it from some one else. Any deed becomes sin when this is the motive. The very same deed may be sin in one man and saviourhood in another. In the Indian Mutiny, for instance, a small party of Englishmen, sustained by the courage and self-devotion of one good woman, held out for many hours in a small house against a murderous horde of sepoys. In the end they were overwhelmed by superior numbers, and just before the last frail door was broken down the senior officer turned to the brave lady, bowed low, and shot her through the heart. He did precisely what the enemy meant to do, though no doubt they meant to do it more cruelly. What would have been wickedness on their part was kindness on his. No, sin is not the deed; it is the motive that inspires the deed. And that motive is always the same; it is the desire to get more abundant life by robbing others. The sinner may not put it this way to himself; he may not deliberately say so, but then he does it. The sinfulness of his deed consists in the fact that he is willing to gratify himself at the expense of others, without, perhaps, pausing to reflect upon the matter at all. He does not know either — or does not care to know — that the life he craves is God's own life, and that by the law of God's own being it is just as impossible to get and keep that life in a selfish way as to try to preserve a flower fresh for ever by tearing it out of the bed where it grows. The end of such an action

is the death of the flower; the life goes back to the universe.

It should now be plain that we can only get life by giving ourselves to it. This is the eternal spiritual law which sin tries in vain to violate. If you want the ocean, plunge into it; you cannot carry it away in handfuls. If you want the life eternal — the life that underlies all phenomena, the life you love in your nearest and dearest, the life which is God — you must give yourself to it in full and glad surrender. Thus the path of love is the path of life. It is also the path of wisdom, whereas sin is the path of folly. In the long run it is the path of light and joy, whereas sin is the path of darkness and pain. Sin and love are the precise opposites of each other, and yet sinner and saint are, consciously or unconsciously, seeking for exactly the same thing. They both want the all-abundant life.

Will you allow me, in closing, to be very direct in my appeal to those who hear me? I want you to see that all your activities come under one or other of these designations; that they are concerned with the same eternal reality, and that according to the way you approach that reality is your self-expression failure or success. Thus sexual love is man giving himself to woman to cherish, minister, and protect. In so doing he loses himself to find himself in larger and more abundant life. Lust is exactly the same thing working in the opposite way, tearing away from womanhood the life that

seems attractive, destroying instead of building up. The same antithesis is everywhere discernible. Whatever is not love is sin. Love is lifewardness; sin is deathwardness. How do our lives stand this scrutiny? Can you honestly say that yours is governed by the love motive? If not, what fruit do you suppose you will have as harvests come and go? Every cruel word you speak; every effort you put forth to increase your own well-being, regardless of what it may mean to another; every hard, grasping, unscrupulous use you make of time and opportunity will tell against you when the reckoning comes. You are making a bad mistake — the mistake of all self-seekers, whether they call themselves sinners or not. Perhaps you do not know what you really want in your frantic efforts to get this and that which you hope will increase your joys. If not, I will tell you: you want God. That is why you ever reach forth to anything that seems to you, for the moment, good. And you will never find perfect rest in anything less than communion with God. Jesus said so, and Jesus knew. Having this, you have all. If you have been living a life of sin, you are unhappy; it could not be otherwise. And, remember, the real life of sin is just the life of self-seeking, and that may be lived by a professing Christian with just the same result. He is unhappy; he does not know God; he has chosen the path of death. But, on the other hand, there is no life so sunken and



degraded, so dark and sad, but that the light of God will break over it and the life of God will pour into it as soon as the self is laid upon the altar of Christ-like love. I speak what I know, and testify what I have seen, when I say that there is no evil habit which cannot be broken when the power of Divine love is sincerely invoked. I will acknowledge no exception. I do not care what you may have been or what you are, the claim of simple faith upon the love of God never goes unhonoured. It is as much a spiritual law as the law that the wages of sin is the death of the good the sinner thought to get. Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Believe it: claim the promise, and enter into life.

## LOVE DESTROYING AND RESTORING

“Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest,  
Return, ye children of men.” — Ps. xc. 3.

THIS text has been burdening my mind for some time, because I could not see what it meant. I know now. It would perhaps be a useful exercise for some of you to put the question to yourselves at this moment before we proceed any farther with our examination of the passage. What do you think this statement means? In its English dress it is certainly somewhat obscure, and yet in the Revised Version of the Old Testament it has been allowed to stand. I think I can see the reason for this. It is because of the dual meaning of the word destruction, and upon the interpretation of that word the whole sentence turns. It is a word which may be rendered “destruction,” “dissolution,” or “dust.” By analogy it has a further meaning in the sphere of ethics and religion, as we shall see presently. The literal meaning of the text therefore is, “Thou sendest man to the grave [or to the dust], and sayest, Return, ye children of men, to the earth whence ye were taken.” It is thus an echo of the curse pronounced upon Adam in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis: “Dust thou art, and unto

dust shalt thou return.” There is nothing very inspiring about this declaration, and yet there can be little doubt that it was present to the poet’s mind. There is not much in the Old Testament to encourage belief in personal immortality. On the face of it, therefore, we have here a reminder of the brevity of human life as contrasted with the eternal greatness of God. The sentiment is the same as that of the fine passage in the hundred and third Psalm: “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him, and His righteousness unto children’s children.”

This, I say, is all we are justified in assuming as to the literal meaning of our text. The Jew of Old Testament times did not greatly concern himself with the survival of individual existence beyond the grave. The only immortality with which he had much concern was that of the nation, and that was an immortality entirely of this world: Israel was God’s child, whose existence was guaranteed from generation to generation in accordance with the Divine promise. The thought of the value of personality, as we know it now, was a very gradual

growth; and it is interesting to note that just in proportion as the worth of the individual and the reality of individual moral freedom began to come into prominence, belief in personal immortality began to grow too. But this belief never attained any very great proportions. Even up to the time when Jesus was born the notion of a life beyond the grave was very hazy, even where it was held at all.

But there is a further meaning attaching to the words of our text, a meaning which has little or nothing to do with the question of immortality, and the literal meaning is only to be understood as a figure wherewith to illustrate a moral truth. I am sure you will agree with me that this moral truth is what was really present to the writer's mind when I tell you what it is. I have already said that the thought of the text turns upon the interpretation we give to the word rendered "destruction." Now here is a very interesting point. This word is elsewhere rendered "contrition." As such it appears in various forms in some of the most familiar passages in the Psalms and the Book of Isaiah. Take, for example, Psalm xxxiv. verse 18: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." Or take the fifty-first Psalm, verse 17: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise." In both of these beautiful devotional utterances the word used for

“contrite” is that which in our text is rendered “destruction.” Now turn to the Book of Isaiah, and you will find the same root word employed to express the same spiritual idea. Take the fifteenth verse of the fifty-seventh chapter: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

This use of the word destruction to express contrition supplies the key to my text. I can see now quite plainly what the Psalmist means. He does mean, of course, that death is the appointed lot of all men:

Art is long, and time is fleeting;  
And our hearts, though stout and brave,  
Still like muffled drums are beating  
Funeral marches to the grave.

But where would be the good of saying only this? Especially where would be the good of telling this to God? God does not need the information. But the whole subject takes on a higher meaning the moment we realise that this sentence is an acknowledgment of the gracious dealings of God with the human soul. He is the source of all contrition — that is, He humbles into the dust our pride and self-will. God is always saying to the wanderers, “Return, ye children of men.” Destruction waits upon all our efforts after self-aggrandisement. Our ridic-

ulous little pomp and pretence, our love of recognition from our fellows, our desire to domineer over one another — must all be brought low. This is the tone and spirit of this whole Psalm. The sense of shortcoming is exceptionally great; the writer is all the time humbling himself before the Almighty, and entering sweetly into the recognition that the soul belongs to God and has no other home: "Thou has set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. . . . O satisfy us early with Thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." I think you will all agree that this is what the writer intends to declare. Just as death resolves the human body into dust, so will the righteousness of God humble our self-love that He may draw us back to Himself. The spiritual truth thus declared is exceedingly beautiful and helpful, and we cannot do better than dwell upon it for a little while longer.

How does God do all this? God comes to the rescue of mankind in and through mankind. There is something here which the Psalmist saw in principle, but which until Jesus came the world had never seen in full expression. We cannot now look at a statement of this kind without seeing it in the light which the Gospel of Jesus throws upon it. On

Thursday morning last I made a statement in the course of my sermon which needed expansion, and to which I promised to return at some future time. As far as I can remember, it was something like this. The love of Christ is such that in the presence of sin it will willingly accept the Cross, and go on accepting it, until there is nothing left but love. Now this is a very far-reaching statement, with enormous implications, and I want you to realise it for what it is. By the love of Christ, of course, I mean the Divine passion expressed in the life and death of Jesus. I mean the love of God in man. I believe that that Divine passion is at work in the world to-day, and that it is the redeeming force against which in the long run no sin or suffering can stand. It centres in Jesus, and is set in motion by faith in Jesus, but I recognise it wherever self-sacrifice is turning pride and self-will to destruction and lifting mankind back to God.

No imagery can rise too high above the dream of life,  
No love-ideal soars too high above the vale of strife;  
No effort of the loving heart can be too highly priced,  
No sacrifice can rise above the sacrifice of Christ.  
Go; be a Christ, and in thy state of Christhood thou shalt  
    know  
All man can give to man to-day was given long ago.

Christ-love is God's righteous love revealed in man. Now, there are various things which this love can teach us when we really get to understand the nature of it. The first is that there is no such

thing as individualism either in suffering or salvation. At a certain stage of spiritual experience we are prone to think a good deal of pains and penalties on account of wrong-doing, and it is right that we should. These pains and penalties are the outcome of what the Bible metaphorically calls the wrath of God. But there is no such thing as the wrath of God, if by that expression we mean that God gets angry and cherishes thoughts of vengeance as we mortals do; God is consistently and unchangingly love, never hate. But love pursuing sin may — indeed must — inflict pain upon the sinner; there is no help for it. The heat of the summer sun, the life-giver of the earth, may turn to lightning when its operations are hindered by adverse conditions. Just so it is in the dealings of God with man. Love is always love and nothing else, but love will not hesitate to destroy that which is false and unworthy in human experience. It will strip off all the encrustations of our self-delusions, that it may lay bare the soul. It turns to destruction that it may save. "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is," and nothing evil can endure in the all-devouring flame of the retributive love of God. I hope you will all admit this before we go any farther. If we could get all men to see that life is so organised that the love of God will make hell as well as heaven, the gain to true religion would be vast indeed. It is not now and then, but always, that the love of God works for the destruction of



every dark and sinister product of human selfishness. If you sin you must suffer; that is the law of the spiritual universe, the law of love. Sometimes it must seem as though it were not so, but the universe is wide, and what we know of it now is but a small corner of the great reality. He with whom "a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past" has plenty of scope for the operation of His purpose in the case of every single soul. Let me repeat that anywhere and everywhere in the vast universe of God love is the destruction of everything that is not itself.

But there is nothing atomistic about all this. The very same love which the sinner feels as the wrath of God is the love which suffers for him as well as in him. I notice that the one thing in the Christian Gospel which people feel to be most precious, and which they are least willing to see assailed, is the truth that Jesus bore their sins upon the Cross. They feel the truth of this even though they cannot defend it, and they are perfectly right; it *is* the marrow of the evangel of the Cross. Without this truth it would not be worth while to preach Christianity at all; it is the power of God unto salvation. It is an impressive thing to recognise that the human heart has instinctively perceived the redemptive value of this truth even under the most repellent forms of statement. But what I now wish you to see is the fact that the range of this truth is much wider than is generally supposed. Love divine is such that

it can recognise no self but the whole. It will keep on bearing the penalty of sin, no matter whose the sin may be, until sin is no more and there is nothing left but love. Picture the matter to yourself in this way. Try to imagine that the being you love most in all the world has been guilty of the folly of some action which has meant utter ruin to him or her. It may be your own child. What would you do in such a case? Can you imagine any penalty you would not be willing to bear if the object of your love could be saved thereby? Would the sufferer have any suffering that would not be yours too? Could he or she feel the awfulness of the situation more than you? In fact, if it were humanly possible, would you not willingly take the whole burden of responsibility upon yourself? And even now your self-identification with the pain and loss and sorrow of the situation is so complete that it could no farther go. I have little doubt that I am speaking to some one who knows quite well what it means to feel like this, for you have been through it. Very likely there is some one here who is sharing a sinner's hell and feeling it more than the sinner himself. Well, understand that you have entered right into the very heart of the mysterious truth expressed on Calvary, the passion of God for men. The nearer you rise towards the heart of the all-Father the greater will this passion become. We can dimly realise, therefore, how Jesus must have felt towards mankind. It was as though the sinner

were Himself; nay, more than that, as though He had no self except the sinner. Sin itself is nothing but a denial of the love of God; it never is anything else. Sin is just that in human experience which is not love, and love must suffer to destroy it. Or we will put it another way: Sin is the attempt to build a wall of separation around the soul, and love is the life eternal shattering the barriers and forcing its way in, that the imprisoned soul may find liberty. Sin always has its root in ignorance; it is the soul foolishly trying to live by what is finite instead of by what is infinite, and this is what love can never permit. And so the mighty process goes on, and so it will go on until the final victory is won and a redeemed humanity is gathered home to God. There is no hell which love will not share, no cross it will not carry, no penalty of sin which it does not feel as its own. I am at a loss for language wherewith to state this truth as strongly as I feel it. But perhaps it may be put into a single sentence: there is no such thing in the wide universe of God as a lonely hell, although the sinner may feel it to be such. The love of God is always there: it is that which makes hell, and in itself it is heaven.

But, some one may remark, this is not just. You have practically told us that the righteous must suffer on account of the guilty, and must go on doing so while any guilt remains. But this is unfair. If I have lived an upright life, I am entitled to the reward thereof; and if my neighbour has not done

so, he ought to reap what he has sown: what have I to do with his harvest of pain? I can soon tell you. Your own harvest of joy will be incomplete while it is possible to ask such a question. You cannot disentangle destinies in that way. Ask yourself what is noblest and divinest in human life to-day. Is it not the impulse to place one's whole consciousness of self upon the altar of redeeming love? Is not the Christ man the man who refuses to be content while want, and misery, and ignorance work their sad results in the shadowing of human life and the lessening of human joy? Can you conceive anything higher than to be able to say, "That loss is my loss; that pain is my pain; that life is my life — I cannot come into possession of my own until that is redeemed"? I am sure you would feel like this. Nothing less than this is a real participation in the love of Christ that passeth knowledge. But apply it to sin too. You ought to do so; you must do so. Every sinner is a patient in the hospital of God; he needs pity, for he does not know how ill he is. "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." They that deserve the least require the most. God feels towards every erring child of His just as you feel towards the child that needs the most from you. It sometimes happens that in a family circle there is one child which is a little more trying than the rest, a little less attractive, unlovely in disposition, peevish or sullen, or perhaps with a tendency to darker vices. As a rule you will

find that this is the child over which the mother's heart yearns most tenderly. She sees possibilities that others do not see, and she knows enough of the inner history of that poor little soul to enable her to be patient with the slowness of its growth. She never takes the trouble to balance merit and demerit in the scales of justice; she only knows that a child which is morally sick needs her, and she gives herself ungrudgingly. That is just the way with God, and the more we ponder the matter the more glorious seems the truth about redeeming love. Talk about justice! There is no justice but love. God suffers in the sinner when love brings the fabric of the sinner's selfish hopes and aims to destruction. But all the Christlike love in the universe accepts that suffering too, and rejoices to do so. It cannot help itself: by its very nature love must suffer while sin remains. This is its high prerogative, its priestly glory. In all the Christlike love which is at work in the hearts of men to-day God becomes incarnate for the redemption of the world, crying, "Return, ye children of men!"

Take this truth home to your inmost souls. If you have any one belonging to you who is causing you pain, thank God for being allowed to bear it, for by so doing you have entered into the fellowship of that suffering of Christ which by and by shall ripen into highest joy. Are you bearing some one else's burden, agonising for some one else's fault? Do not fret or murmur, and do not try to escape the

experience. Never wish it otherwise until the thing that has caused this burden-bearing is at an end for evermore. Are you bound by the cords of love to some one who seems utterly unworthy of the holy sacrifice, and who at this present hour has chosen hell on earth instead of heaven? Then go into hell with him, for in this sacrament of love you have become his very self. It is not fair! I laugh at the word. It is something a thousand times better than that. It is God's redeeming passion manifest in you for the utter destruction of all that would hinder two from becoming one. The one thing that can break a sinner's heart is the love that will not let him go. Let him see love accepting his disabilities and sharing his cross, and you have done for him what loveless retribution (if such a thing were possible) could never do. Together we suffer; together we rise. The sure and certain mark that a soul has attained the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is its willingness to identify itself with the lot of the sinner. No sooner has it gained the highest heights than it plunges to the lowest depths, that it may accept the portion of the guilty and set the sinner free. It should make you happier and stronger to know this. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." This is the way in which God is reconciling the world unto Himself. You need ask no greater privilege, you need seek no higher joy. Far, far beyond the thought of a bliss that leaves a darkened soul outside its heaven is the

knowledge of a love that says, "Let me take the place of that suffering one; let me bear all he has deserved; let me enter his darkness and his pain, that he may come to life and light." Some of you already know a little of what this means, for there may be just one soul in existence for whom you would be willing to do it all. Understand then that this is the last word of the eternal righteousness; this is the truth without which heaven could not be. You are on holy ground, and the radiance of the eternal glory is already shining through you. "The path of the just is as the light of the dawn which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

## THE TURNING FROM INIQUITY

“Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” — ACTS iii. 26.

THIS passage forms the conclusion of Peter's address to the populace gathered at Solomon's Porch after the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. It was not a long discourse, but it contains some remarkable things, our text being perhaps the most remarkable of all. Before going on to try to interpret its message, it may be well to consider briefly and in detail the allusions made and the terms employed both in the sentence itself and the immediate context.

The opening phrase is not without significance — “Unto you first.” The apostle is here represented as telling his Jewish audience that the message of Christianity was intended primarily for them. This statement can be readily understood when we remember what that message was supposed to imply; you will find more than one allusion to it in the verses preceding, and I ask you to notice that in emphasis it was quite different from what a modern preacher would say, or expect his hearers to believe. We must remember that these Jews were looking



for a sudden and forceful winding up of the world's affairs. They were not anticipating an actual end of the world so much as a fresh and more hopeful beginning. They thought that God would interfere by means of a supernaturally gifted representative called the Messiah, and would break the Roman yoke from off the necks of the chosen people. Then, they thought, a long period of happiness and prosperity would begin, not only for the Jews but for all the nations of the earth. I am not sure that this latter part of the blessing was universally believed in; on the contrary, some of the Jews loved to dwell upon the thought that the Gentiles would be outside the scope of this promise. But here in Peter's discourse it is stated as plainly as possible: "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed."

The next thing to notice is that the little group of Christians of whom Peter was the spokesman believed that the Messiah who should bring all this about was Jesus. They believed that the crucifixion had done no harm, so far as this hope was concerned, beyond the fact that it had filled up the cup of the world's iniquity. Thus Peter says to his hearers, "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and killed the Prince of life." Peter and his followers believed that Jesus would come again very soon, with great power and glory, to inaugurate this

reign of God for which all devout men were looking. I wish you to notice that the Jews and Christians of this time were looking for exactly the same thing, only that the Jews did not believe that Jesus would be the means of bringing it about, whereas the Christians maintained that He would.

There is one other point of some consequence implied in the wording of the text. It is this: Our Authorised Version says, "God having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you." But the Revised Version simply says, "God having raised up His servant." It may seem to you that this alteration lessens the force of the saying, and that "servant" is not as good a word as "Son" to express the spiritual dignity of Jesus. If you think this, however, let me assure you that you are quite mistaken. This is another of the allusions made in the text to ideas with which we are not familiar now, but which were of great significance to Peter's audience. This is a reference to that great ideal set forth in the pages of the second Isaiah — the suffering servant of God. Take, for example, Isaiah xlii. 1: "Behold My servant, whom I uphold; Mine elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Now, the really striking thing about Peter's use of these words is the fact that he identifies the suffering servant of God with the Messiah, a thing the Jews did not wish to do. The Jews always thought of the Messiah as a mighty conqueror, a glorious

deliverer. The last thing they ever imagined was that their Messiah could possibly be crucified as a common criminal. And yet that is just what Peter is now telling them. He tells them that the long-awaited Messiah had come to earth as the suffering servant of God; had lived in their midst as a poor man; had done His best by means of the word of love and truth to turn them away from their iniquities; and that in the end they had committed the dreadful deed of putting Him to death with ignominy. The point of his exhortation now is that they should repent of having done this, and should turn with all their hearts towards Him whom they had thus wickedly rejected. If not, said Peter, they would be left as completely outside the kingdom of God when it came as the most wicked of the Gentiles would be.

It is always extremely interesting to me to get at the bottom of the ideas which are taken for granted in such a passage as this, and I trust therefore that the brief examination we have just made will not be altogether unprofitable. It shows us, at any rate, that the people who first heard my text spoken or read looked upon life rather differently from what you and I do. We are not expecting a sudden winding up of human affairs and the making of a fresh start; neither are most of us looking for a dramatic second coming of Christ. Some of us may, but our expectation is not so intense as that of these first Christians. But there is one thing in

which we take exactly the same ground as the Apostle Peter and his friends: Like them, we know from experience that the power of the Spirit of Jesus does continue to bless the world in turning men away from their iniquities. Let me try to show you what I think this means.

To begin with, I may as well say plainly that there is no subject upon which Christian thought needs to be more clearly readjusted at the present day than the subject of sin. It is not too much to say that the thought of sin has lain like a nightmare upon the Christian consciousness for many centuries, and it is time we got rid of it. It has surprised me greatly to observe the slowness and timidity with which many, even among liberal religious thinkers, give up the sombre views of the theologians of the past on this one subject. They seem afraid of being accused of trifling with the moral sense if they obey their own higher instinct when considering the responsibility of man to God. We are constantly being told that if we say this, or if we do that, men will break free from all moral restraints and plunge into the pleasures of self-indulgence. Never was there a greater delusion. I do not deny that the appeal to fear has occasionally produced salutary results, but, at the best, fear is a poor motive for doing right, and altogether inferior in effect to the power of love.

Now, just look at this question for a moment, first in the light of theological tradition, and then

in that of spiritually minded common sense. For ages the theologian has been telling us, and the average Christian professes to believe, that sin is some vague, terrible, baffling force which has divided man from God and made it inevitable that God should take some sort of vengeance upon him. The situation has been painted in the most sombre colours. Preachers nowadays hesitate to say straight out as much as their doctrines imply, for they have a misgiving, not only as to their validity, but even as to their moral reasonableness. It was not so with their predecessors, however. Why do we so commonly fail to realise that the horrible implications of the conventional doctrine of sin do not belong to Christianity at all, but to the inhuman theologisings of centuries later? — and a sinister inheritance they are. Thus, whether we say it plainly or not, the ordinary doctrine of sin implies an angry God, a fallen race, a distant judgment day, and a hopeless punishment of the impenitent. It also implies that God has been defeated in His own universe, not merely by one man here and there, but by the whole human race. It tells us explicitly that God feels Himself unable to forgive until He has inflicted some penalty upon some one for the wrong-doing of mankind. It assumes, moreover, that none of us can free ourselves from the dreadful entail; individually we are not responsible for the entrance of sin into the world, but we are just as guilty as though we had started pure and flawless; in the sight of

God we are all foul and polluted, and we ought to feel it. We are all miserable sinners, no matter how reputable the life we have lived; and until we realise this God's pardoning love cannot even begin to take effect, and the merits of the Saviour will be of no avail.

I am quite convinced that this way of viewing the subject of human imperfection has done a great deal of mischief in the world, and is having bad results to-day. Thank God, men are breaking away from it in spite of the theologians and even in spite of the preachers. It has made much misery, and has hindered untold thousands from rising into a purer and more spiritual experience of the relations of the soul and God, while it has led men to despise rather than to reverence human nature. Somehow we fail to see that when we pour scorn and contempt upon humanity we are bringing an indictment against God, "in whom we live and move and have our being." The greater part of the ordinary so-called Christian doctrine of sin is a sorrow-breeding lie. We have got to change the whole point of view. We must not continue to let men think that unless they can screw themselves into the mood of self-loathing they are regarded with disfavour in the eyes of God. Instead of thinking of humanity as a Divine ideal gone grievously wrong, we must think of it as a Divine unfolding, the full glory and plenitude of which is not yet. We must think of human life as a progress, and sin as the occasional wandering from

the king's highway. We must think of it as an upward reach, and sin as the temporary failure to attain. An athlete sets forth to run a race, and in so doing slips and falls; but he would not have fallen if he had never run. A soldier goes out to contend against the foe, and suffers a severe defeat; but he would not have been defeated if he had never fought. Is not this a truer point of view than the impossible talk about an otherwise perfect world marred by the presence of the intruder called sin? Every upward step, every expansion of experience, every emergence of higher possibilities, renders humanity liable to fail in new regions of attainment; but these failures are the failures of the child learning to walk. We may sum the matter up by saying that sin is not a positive force marring a previously perfect world, but the incidental failure or failures of humanity in its upward progress towards the full realisation of the eternal life which is eternal love.

If once we can grasp this simple truth, and adopt the corresponding point of view, we shall come to see that there is no sin against God which is not also a sin against man. If once we can get men's minds open to this illuminating fact, the gain to true religion will be immeasurable. For one thing, we shall get rid of all unreality in our confession of short-coming and wrong-doing. At present, we come into church and confess sin in a general way without seeming to realise that the real sin consists in the injury we have done to man by the omissions and

commissions of our selfish everyday life. Just look at the case for a moment. Ask yourself what you have ever done that you know and feel to be wrong; ask yourself why it was wrong, and you will soon see that it was because you have caused pain or loss to some individual, or some circle of human beings, or humanity as a whole. If, for example, you have become the victim of an evil habit, you are not only injuring yourself, but causing sorrow and hardship to those who love you. Moreover, instead of fulfilling your vocation in blessing and helping humanity, you may be a curse to it; you are doing harm not only by the evil you have wrought, but by the good you have failed to perform. If you are a bad husband and father, your life is casting a blight over your wife and children, for no life can be isolated or lived to itself alone. It only requires a little reflection in order to see this. There is not a single human action, not a single human thought, which can properly be called sinful which is not a wrong done to humanity. You cannot sin against God without sinning against man. Any evil done to yourself or to any other individual is an evil done to the whole race. It is no use trying to separate between God and man when considering this question. All sin may rightly be thought of as iniquity — that is in-equity or injustice — between the individual and the race or between man and man. I want you hard-headed Englishmen to go home and think this out, and then see whether it is



enough to come to church and confess sin as though it had nothing to do with the effect of your life upon human happiness. The world is suffering to-day because we are trying to score off one another instead of helping one another, trying to grab and keep the good things of earth for ourselves instead of making them a means of blessing to our kind. We are jealous of one another; cruel, censorious, afraid of trusting one another; crafty, insincere, intent upon gaining by one another's loss. Imagine the world purged of iniquity — in-equity — and it would be heaven. There is hardly a single thing I could mention as being a cause of sadness or uneasiness to those who are now listening to me which is not traceable in some way to human selfishness, and human selfishness is bound to show itself in action as iniquity.

Suppose you were to test your lives in this way. Suppose instead of saying, "I repent of all my sin against God," you omit the general statement for a while and say: "I repent of having shares in a business which is dealing unjustly with those it employs; I repent of trying to entrap my neighbour into a deal which would have been a gain to me and a loss to him; I repent of having been a bully to those in my power; I repent of being hard upon the weak when I might have been helpful and considerate; I repent of making home miserable by showing my worst side there and my best out of doors; I repent of having considered my own ease and comfort

when I had the opportunity of lifting burdens from weary backs; I repent of being contented with my own lot when there were wrongs to be righted and griefs to be comforted all around me; I repent of refusing to respond to God's call to be a helper in work that lay near to my hand." I think if sin were confessed in this way for a while the world might get on faster. All such things as these are iniquities, and sin against God is iniquity against man.

This brings me straight to Jesus. Why is Jesus the Saviour and Redeemer of the world? It is because He saw so plainly that what the world was suffering from was lack of love. Iniquity is only the refusal to obey the law of love. If men's hearts were filled with love the world would be filled with joy. Jesus not only saw this but lived it, and to do so in the presence of the blind selfishness of humanity caused Him untold suffering, and finally brought Him to a violent death. The greatest iniquity the world has ever perpetrated was the killing of the Prince of life. No sooner was it done than some of those who had known and loved Jesus began to see what it was that had given Him such power over their hearts. They found too that He was alive and helping and supporting them in their endeavour to live the life of love which He had lived. This discovery came to them as a kind of emancipation, a wonderful spiritual uplift setting them free from their former worldly feelings and desires. They found that this new life was a life

of far greater happiness than the old life of petty struggles and ambitions had ever been. They just yielded themselves up to the spirit of Jesus, which to them was the spirit of love, and they found that it transformed their whole world.

It is doing so to-day. Faith in Jesus is faith in Divine love, and that is the one thing needed to turn men away from their iniquities. So long as men go on fighting one another, and trying to get the better of one another, so long will the world be dark and wretched. But so soon as men become willing to take up the Cross in their desire to serve and help one another, they will learn that there is nothing in the wide universe so strong as love. It is all so simple and yet so sweetly true. You can soon prove it for yourself if you like to try. If you will just give yourself up to the service of this dear Redeemer of mankind, if you will let His spirit possess you wholly, you will never need to fear again. There is a wonderful rapture in being delivered from self-service, self-pity, self-regard. To be filled with Divine love is to be filled with joy and power. There is a glorious exhilaration in being alive when you know that you are the servant of God to one great end, namely, filling the whole earth with the sweetness of Divine compassion and making it a kingdom of love.

## THE CLEANSING LIFE

“If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” — 1 JOHN i. 7.

It is somewhat remarkable that the latter part of our text should be so frequently quoted apart from the former, and yet, as can easily be seen from a scrutiny of the whole passage in which it appears, the writer never meant that the two should be considered independently. The latter part of the text, indeed, is immediately dependent upon the former. When this fact is taken into account the effect is rather striking. According to the writer of this epistle, “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin” — if we walk in the light. This is hardly the way in which we are usually accustomed to hear the matter stated. It is far more commonly put thus: The blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all your sins if you will only accept by faith the benefits of His atoning work. But acceptance on faith and walking in the light are surely not quite the same thing. There must be some ratio between the two, but walking in the light does not imply a completed action; rather it implies something which is continually going on. Let us look into this question, for it is a highly important one.

To get at the meaning of the text we shall have to try to get at the bottom of the terms employed in it, and that will involve putting some prepossessions out of our minds.

To begin with, let me remind you that the writer of this epistle belonged to the great Alexandrian school, and therefore his favourite ideas and ways of putting things are those which were characteristic of the Alexandrian thinkers, especially Philo. Now, one of Philo's principal sayings was that God is light. He meant that God is the universal mind, the mind which contains nothing of error, and from which no truth is hidden; God knows all, and sees it as a whole. The Alexandrian Christians gave this conception a great ethical value. They thought of knowing and loving as being the same thing. He that loves knows life, the life of God, as it really is. To be filled with love is to have found the heart of things. A further way of putting the same truth was to declare that wherever the flame of love, the spirit of pure unselfishness, was kindled in a human heart, there God was present as the light of the world. This light is never wholly absent from any man, but sometimes it is a mere glimmer in the darkness. To the God who indwells humanity—and who is present in every human soul, however dark that soul may be—these old thinkers gave the name of the Word, the Son, or the eternal Christ, "The light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

This is the meaning of the term employed in the first part of our text. The writer says we must walk in that light — the light which is love — if we would be in harmony with all the rest of existence. We have to be true to it, and refuse to substitute anything else for it. We must obey this inward light, the truth which is love, and we shall dwell with God. This is not merely believing something; it is being and doing something. "Doing the truth," the writer of this epistle calls it.

Now let us look at the second part of the text. What is the blood of Jesus Christ? Some of you may think at once that this is a question which requires no answer, for every one knows the answer already; but I am not so sure about that. By the blood of Christ the Johannine writers never mean the actual physical blood which was shed on Calvary. That blood was all spilled in a few dreadful hours; it fell on the ground, and there was an end of it. But there was another kind of blood, of which that blood was the symbol, and which made Jesus willing for that blood to be shed — namely, the forth-given, freely-offered life of Christ, the God in man. Jesus revealed that life, lived that life, gave that life, and in giving it called it forth in others. Jesus never did anything else than give His life all through His earthly ministry. The light by which He walked was the love of God, and that love made Him desire to give Himself completely to the task of drawing all men into a

holy fellowship with God. No sacrifice could have been more complete than the sacrifice which came to an end on Calvary, whereby Jesus demonstrated in the fullest degree the love of God in man giving itself to and for man. Do not think of that sacrifice as though God had arranged it in some formal way in order that He might be free to forgive sins. What happened simply was that a perfectly noble and unselfish human being was killed by a wicked world, but the spirit in which He lived and died went on making others willing to live the same life. That spirit in other people — the spirit of self-sacrificing love — was, and is, the real blood of Christ; it is a spirit of wonderful redeeming power.

A third question we must ask before passing on. What is the sin which is here referred to? Well, without entering into any elaborate explanation, let me say that it is that spirit in human nature which tends to make a man look after himself at the expense of his fellows. It is the exact opposite of the spirit of Christ. If the spirit of Christ is the spirit which sacrifices self for the good of others, sin is the spirit which sacrifices others for the sake of self. If the spirit of God is the spirit of light, this is the spirit of darkness. It is the source of nearly all the unhappiness in the world to-day. To cleanse the world from the presence of this evil spirit is the one great thing that needs to be done in order to save it and unite it to God.

You can now see quite plainly where the writer of

our text is taking us. He is no obscurantist, this; he means every word he says, and he knows quite well why he says it. He does not put his case quite in the same way that a modern thinker would put it if he were stating it for the first time, but those for whom this man wrote would not be in any doubt as to his meaning; they were used to this way of putting things. Such terms as those I have now examined had a well understood value and significance for the Greeks and Jews of Alexandria and places like Alexandria. Their mental symbols were not those which we use now in our ordinary everyday speech, but they were quite good symbols, with a moral and spiritual content of great beauty and power. The only danger in using them to-day is that we may use the form without the content. Do not let us make that mistake now. Let me urge you to put out of your minds at once any interpretation of these words which involves the acceptance of something for which you cannot see a good reason.

Now I will make bold to say that, when you come to think of it, you cannot see any good reason why our Lord Jesus should have had to die on Calvary in order that God might feel Himself free to forgive human sin. Thousands of hymns will be sung this week and thousands of sermons preached in which the assertion will be made that by His sacrificial death Jesus freed mankind from its guilt, and that all we have now to do in order to be jus-



tified before God is to claim the benefit of that finished work. But that is simply not true, and no one could possibly show any good reason why it should be true. There is not a hint or a suggestion in my text that this was the result effected by the death of Jesus. Jesus was tortured to death, not by God, but by man. The spirit of love in Him came into sharp conflict with the spirit of ignorance and hate in His murderers, and overcame it by submitting to the worst that it could do. Every one who has ever loved Jesus since that day has felt the power of that same spirit in his heart. To love Jesus is to walk in the light. How could it be otherwise? The passionate loyalty of Peter, James, John, and later the Apostle Paul, to the risen and exalted Jesus, was caused by the fact that Jesus lived the atoning life, a life that submitted to death rather than change its holy purpose. Trust in Him at once resulted in the uprising of that same life in their own hearts. It made them like Jesus, and cleansed them from the presence and power of the spirit of darkness and death, which we call sin.

Try to understand this, for it is perfectly simple as well as gloriously true. The only way to save a man from the dominion of sin is to bring him under the power of the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of light and love, the spirit of harmony with God. The longer a man lives under the dominion of that spirit the less opportunity does sin obtain within him and the more does he become like Jesus. In fact, just

in proportion as he ceases to be a sinner does he become a saviour. This is precisely what the writer means by this text of ours, and he could not have told us anything more beautiful. To walk in the light of that truth gives the spirit of Christ full opportunity within us, and the blood of Christ, that is, the forth-given life of Christ, the life of God in every man, cleanseth us from all sin.

But, some one will say: You have not told us everything. Think of the terrible condition of those who are without God and without hope in this world. Think of the broken-hearted man with a guilty past from which he cannot get free. Think of the sinner whose burden of sin is so great that he feels he can never get rid of it in this world or the next, and that atonement can never be made. What have you to say about a moral problem such as this?

Well, I have nothing different to say from what has already been said, but that is sufficient. The truth thus declared in my text will cover every moral problem that can possibly arise. I think it would be true to say that comparatively few of the men and women before me feel the burden of personal guilt to be so awful that they cannot expect forgiveness from God without some drastic outside action on the part of a redeemer, and yet every one of you would admit and deplore the presence and the power of sin in your lives. But even if it were so, even if there were some man here to whom life is now a black midnight because of some wicked deed or

course of action in the past, the memory of which is an unremitting torture, the same principle would hold good. The blood of Christ will cleanse you from that foul sore if you walk in the light. But you must walk in the light. If you have anything hidden away which you ought to acknowledge, and dare not acknowledge for fear of painful consequences, you are not walking in the light. Bring that thing out of the darkness and show it to God. If you have injured any one, do your best to make restitution, for that is what this writer means by doing the truth. You cannot make full restitution — no one ever can; but you can put away coward fear and do your best, and God never asks more than that. Come out into the light. Have nothing in your life that you dare not face out. Be true at all costs, and see what follows. You will feel the peace of heaven enter your storm-tossed soul. You will not be left to fight your battle alone, nor will you feel that you are. All the love in the universe will come to your help, and will break one by one the chains that bind you to your evil past. There is nothing which needs to be done for you which it cannot do. It will conform you to the likeness of Jesus by separating you from sin and uniting you to eternal love. Remember that when a man has become so changed in spirit and outlook upon life as to be utterly incapable of a sin of which he was formerly guilty, he is now as though that sin had never been committed. He is cleansed

from the stain of it. He is a new man. Henceforth his greatest joy is to be a living sacrifice to the ideal of Jesus. He has escaped from selfhood into the life of God.

There is a class of sins to which, of course, it is not so easy to apply this principle, but it holds good all the same if you only give it time enough. And no lesser principle will do anything at all to help in such a case. I mean, say, where a man has blighted and ruined another life than his own, and cannot overtake the mischief he has done. In such a case repentance, if genuine, would mean bitter and unavailing sorrow. If it did not, there would be something sadly wrong with the quality of the repentance. I verily believe there are some people in the world who hardly dare to repent of their wrongdoing, because they know that other lives which they have blackened still remain in sin. Did any of you grown men ever lead a weak lad wrong? Did you ever teach foulness to a pure heart? Did you ever introduce an innocent being to scenes where he or she was not strong enough to stand for purity and truth? Then I do not envy you your state of mind when you think of your record. You have a good deal to put right besides your own salvation. In fact, there is no salvation for you which has no relation to these victims of your evil days. But, for your comfort, let me tell you that the same thing applies to salvation in general. If you are truly penitent you will find that it is your

business to seek and to save that which is lost, here and hereafter, and all the love of Christ in the spiritual universe is with you in the task. That is what God wants you to do, and you must never mind how much it costs you to do it. It will demand your very life-blood, and you must not withhold it. The blood of Christ will be shed in you and through you for the sins of the world.

Go, all of you, to your divinely appointed task of manifesting the love of God to a perishing world. Do not suffer anything to keep you back from it. If you are a sinner, that is the best way to get free from your sin. And the more you can rise above sin the more you will go on pouring forth that sacrificial, wonder-working life, just as the mounting sun of springtime, the light of heaven, becomes the life of every leaf and flower that struggles for expression upon earth.

He whose heart is full of tenderness and truth,  
Who loves mankind more than he loves himself,  
And cannot find room in his heart for hate,  
May be another Christ. We all may be  
The saviours of the world, if we believe  
In the Divinity that dwells in us  
And worship it, and nail our grosser selves,  
Our tempers, greeds, and our unworthy aims,  
Upon the Cross. Who giveth love to all  
Pays kindness for unkindness, smiles for frowns,  
And lends new courage to each fainting heart,  
And strengthens hope and scatters joy abroad,  
He too is a redeemer, son of God.

## OUR MORAL LIMITATIONS

“Take away the filthy garments from him.” — ZECH. iii. 4.

THIS passage was written about 520 years before Christ was born. It refers to a time of new but not very hopeful beginnings in the later history of the Jews. We need to know a little about that period before we can rightly understand and enter into the spirit of the text. There is no more interesting book in the world than the Old Testament, even from the human point of view; but it has suffered greatly at the hands of its interpreters. I wish it could be more intelligently handled even to-day by some of its most devoted readers. They fail to take account of the historic perspective, and therefore they fail to appreciate a great part of its moral and religious value. For instance, this book of Zechariah becomes illuminating and suggestive as soon as we take account of the motive which impelled the author to write. Some of you, especially the younger men, may regard this as a dry book. So it is, if you are unable to place yourself in the author's circumstances and look out upon life as it were from his eyes. If you can do that you will find that the book is anything but dry. Suppose we try to do it now.

The central event in later Jewish history was the great captivity in Babylon. The flower of the race was carried away by Nebuchadnezzar, and held in thralldom in the great city of Babylon for more than two generations. Cyrus the Persian overthrew Babylon about the middle of the sixth century B.C., and gave permission to these exiles to return to their homeland, to resume their national life and reconstitute their national worship. He gave them no military protection in so doing; all he gave them was permission, so to speak, to restore under his overlordship the life that had been rudely broken by Nebuchadnezzar. When these people returned to their own land they were very poor; things were quite different with them from what they had been in the years before Nebuchadnezzar descended upon Jerusalem. They found Palestine a dreary waste, as it had been left by its oppressors; Jerusalem lay a ruin; the whole territory was infested by freebooters and border raiders from neighbouring states; consequently they could not at once realise the hopes with which they had set out upon their return journey from Babylon. They had been home about twenty-five years before they began to rebuild the Temple. As a matter of fact, from this time forward Israel was never without a foreign master. People looked wistfully back upon the lost splendour of the days of David and Solomon; they were longing for a restoration of those great days, the palmy age of ancient Israel. We find

echoes of this ideal in the New Testament. You remember the contemporary prophecy concerning Jesus: He was to receive the throne of His father David, and of His kingdom there was to be no end. You remember, too, the pathetic lament of the two who were journeying to Emmaus when Jesus overtook them. They said sorrowfully to one another: We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel. For five hundred years these people had been longing for the impossible — the restoration of the old kingdom, the days of magnificence and splendour, the days of Solomon and his father David. They never came again. Some great preachers of the time of our text realised this, and began to tell the people that it was not so desirable as they supposed that Israel should be materially great. Nehemiah, for instance, said to them in effect: Do not trouble any more about political dominance and splendour; be content with the far nobler mission of being God's moral and spiritual witness in the world. So their message henceforth is a spiritual one: Rebuild the Temple; let that be the centre and symbol of the spiritual work that you have to do for the world.

These were the conditions under which Zechariah began to write and speak. He found the people disheartened, and he wanted to encourage them; he found they were giving up hope of a restoration of national prestige, and he wanted to point out to them their truer vocation; therefore the pur-



pose of his book is to teach the people to recognise that vocation, and to symbolise and express it by setting to work in earnest upon the rebuilding of the Temple. This is the meaning of the book, this is why it was written, and it is mainly owing to the efforts of Zechariah and a few prophets like him that the Temple was actually built at last, remaining a witness for generations to Jehovah in the midst of the nations of the earth.

Now let us look at the text itself. Zechariah here describes one of a number of visions which he uses in a parabolic sense. He seems to see Joshua, the high priest, the spiritual representative of Israel, standing before the angel of the Lord. "The angel of the Lord" probably is the accredited representative of Jehovah in any age; it means the man with spiritual vision, and it may therefore mean the prophet himself and those like him. Poor Joshua stands clothed in filthy rags, and Satan stands near to resist him. "Satan" here is not quite the Satan of Christian tradition. He is not necessarily a wicked being at all, he is simply one whose function it is for the moment to accuse this representative of spiritual Israel at the bar of God. The Lord refuses to listen to the accusation, and instead issues a command: "Take away the filthy garments from him." He continues, "Set a glittering diadem upon his brow" — the symbol of victory — "clothe him in royal garments." Then the angel, turning to Joshua, says: "Behold, I have caused thine

iniquity to pass from thee. . . . Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: If thou wilt walk in My ways, if thou wilt keep My charge, then thou shalt also judge My house, and shalt also keep My courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." It has been suggested that we have here the original of the parable of the Prodigal Son. I hardly think that was so, because though our Lord's acquaintance with the Old Testament was greater than that of most of us, I do not think He needed any special inspiration or prompting in His employment of picture or parable to teach spiritual truth; still the resemblance is striking. Our text is almost an equivalent of "Bring forth the best robe and put on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. For this my son was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." I do not, however, think that Zechariah had this far-reaching evangelical significance of the truth in his mind when he uttered it; I repeat, his object was simply to hearten and encourage the Jews in the practical work of rebuilding the Temple and in the spiritual work of fulfilling their true mission and vocation amongst the nations of the earth. Zechariah did not see the universal application of the truth as it was made by Jesus. There is a principle here which goes very much farther than the prophet himself saw, and it is my task to attempt to set that principle before you.

One of the great problems before the religious

and philosophical mind of to-day is the problem of personality. Many of us hardly know what to think about it. Some of our oldest assumptions concerning it have been overthrown of late; some of the familiar landmarks of thought have been wiped out. For instance, we have been accustomed to assume that personality and self-consciousness meant almost the same thing, were practically co-extensive; that is, that your thought or your knowledge concerning yourself represents all that you are. Consequently it has been assumed that personality in this sense was self-contained, and absolutely exclusive of all other personality; that I am I, and you are you; and that if we exist to all eternity I shall remain I and you will remain you, and that by no possibility can the territories of our respective beings ever overlap. But in the light of psychological research in recent times we have seen reason to reopen the whole question, to re-investigate certain of these assumptions. We are being told that self-consciousness has a very restricted area compared with personality. If you have been on board ship in mid-ocean, doubtless you have noticed at night, when the moon was shining, that you were sailing as it were in the midst of a disc of light, which might extend for many miles on every side of you, and yet beyond it there was a vast extent of unilluminated surface of the illimitable ocean. That is a not inapt figure of what the psychologists are telling us about ourselves. This self-consciousness of ours,

which seems so real, complete, and all-exhaustive, is after all like the illuminated disc on the surface of a vast, dark, and mysterious ocean of being. Or, again, it has been compared to an island in the Pacific: every one of the beautiful islands there is the summit of a mountain which may be five miles deep; that portion which lies beneath the surface of the ocean is vastly greater than that which appears above it. So, the psychologists say, our true personality is vastly greater than our consciousness of it; and, what is more, the submerged portion is the seat of inspiration, and does more work for us than the conscious mind has ever done; so they call it the sub-conscious mind. I feel that to be a somewhat unfortunate title. Sometimes it crosses my vision that perhaps that so-called sub-conscious mind is the true self; perhaps it is more really conscious than this somewhat illusory self-consciousness that we feel to be all. Genius itself has been described as the uprush of subliminal faculty. We all know, however commonplace we may be, that some of our best thoughts are those which come unbidden; which, as it were, leap into consciousness from out of that mysterious region I have described, which is vastly greater than you have any idea of, for that personality of yours came from God and is only partly held in trust by you.

Great as that discovery is, if such it be, its corollary is greater still. It is that our assumption concerning the all-exclusiveness of our particular per-

sonality is not justified by the facts. Thought can be flashed from mind to mind to-day apparently without the intermediary of any material substance whatever. You are thinking, perhaps, of some particular sacred song that once moved you greatly; whilst you are thinking of it, your neighbour in the pew begins to hum it. Or you are just going to speak at the table about something which is of family importance, and you are anticipated by husband, wife, or child: there seems to be a mysterious interrelation of minds. How far one being can interpenetrate another without ceasing to be itself I do not know, but at least we have got as far as this, that our supposed isolation is not really a fact: we are members one of another, and, if you press the truth a little farther, trustees of one another.

The influence of these conceptions upon religious thought cannot fail to be enormous and far-reaching. Their moral significance is quite as great as their metaphysical interest; I have only mentioned the latter in order that I might get at the former. There are two ways, broadly speaking, of describing man's moral status in relation to God: one is that human nature is essentially bad, with perhaps certain possibilities of good; the other is that human nature is essentially good, with certain liabilities to evil. The former view has been the one usually taken by Christian teachers. They find small justification for it in the New Testament, least of all in the words of Jesus, but it is older than Christianity itself.

Jesus Himself was called a sinner by those who taught it. The priests and the Pharisees exclaimed to one of His disciples when they cast Him out, "Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost thou teach us?" As it has been taught by some of the greatest of Protestant epoch-makers — Martin Luther, for instance — it has been held to mean the total depravity, the unrelieved wickedness, of human nature. It has been contended that the human soul is so dark, so utterly depraved, that God had to instil some portion of Himself into our human nature to make it possible for us even to wish to be better. I do not pause to explain in theological terms how it has been held that these lamentable conditions came to exist; suffice it to say that with strange unanimity Christian teachers have taught that the fault was always in man, that he could have helped himself and did not. The human intellect and conscience have revolted against the more terrible implications of that horrible doctrine. Few men, if any, ever held it consistently; in fact, I think I might dare to go so far as to say not one, even when he was most convinced that he did. It told the mother nursing her babe at her breast, that babe over whom her soul yearned, which was to her as a breath from heaven, to believe that it was in reality a little fiend, whose proper habitat was the infernal regions. Great Puritan preachers have described these dear little ones as being in God's sight vipers, venomous reptiles, loathsome

creatures only fit to be destroyed. What a horrible perversion of the teaching of Him who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." But I am glad it was made, because it has carried as far as it could go, to its logical and repellent extreme, that view of human nature which I have been indicating to you. It is a false perspective; no one has ever held it consistently from the first. The truth about human nature is far greater, richer, nobler than Christian thought has even yet articulated. The reason why I have mentioned that repellent distortion of a great truth is that our Christian thinking has not yet shaken itself free from it; the language of our sermons, prayers, and hymns often seems to presume it. We speak, act, and think as though humanity had no worth at all in the sight of God, were innately bad, and that the thing about which God is chiefly concerned is human sin and how to get rid of it. What a poor, parochial view of the meaning of the universe! The truth is that man is essentially good; evil is but the temporary limit imposed upon the nature which is God-like, it is not his true home, it does not represent his eternal destiny; it is the filthy garment which hides and obscures, but which ought never to have been identified with the pure spirit of life beneath. This is the message of Jesus: That man has always been worth the saving, and that he only needed to be shown where he belonged, recalled to himself,

and restored to the Father's home; he never has been expelled from the Father's heart.

Perhaps I need to explain a little more in detail the application of this truth, for fear you may mistake my meaning. Some of you may suppose that this is equivalent to saying that the worst of men, contented in their wickedness, do not need to be improved! It is the precise opposite; it is the declaration of the false life as opposed to the true. Evil is of the nature of limitation; it is the darkness where the light ought to be. It is a negative, not a positive, term. You may call evil positive if you like, but if so you must call good negative; when the one is the other is not. When the gas lamps are lit in the street you become aware of the shadow that was not there before: is the shadow as real as the light? Not at all: it only marks the place where it ought to be; if the light could take possession of that place the darkness would be swallowed up, not merely driven out. Evil is a larger term than sin; it represents all the unideal in the universe of God — pain, poverty, want, conflict, struggle, mourning, woe. There is a purpose underneath the imposing of that condition which is worthy both of God and man, for I can see no means of declaring the essential nature of good apart from the discipline of struggle and pain. To call evil eternal is a contradiction in terms; it is nothing more than the temporal privation of good, it is that against which good proves and realises itself. It



is of God's appointment and for us to overcome. Sin is simply acquiescence in limitation, the choice of the lower and lesser in the presence of the higher and fuller. It is not man's true life, not his resting-place. It is the filthy garment that hides a Divine being. How far a man is responsible for his own transgressions none of us is in a position to say; all that we dare affirm is that we know when we are doing wrong and when we are to blame, but we know not when our neighbour is culpable. Mr. Mallock, in his "Reconstruction of Belief," gives an example (for the accuracy of which of course I cannot vouch) of a man who through an accident in a goods yard was deprived of a portion of his brain, and this reacted unfavourably upon his character. Whereas before he had been noble and upright, generous-hearted, conscientious in the discharge of his duty, he was afterwards cunning, peevish, base, and unreliable in his conduct. Mr. Mallock may not have stated the whole of the case, but all it would appear to prove is that the area of the self-expression of the soul of that man was limited. A dear friend was telling me the other night something about his own father, a godly man, noble and upright, who had served his Master, Christ, through the greater part of a long life. In the evening of his days, and largely in consequence of his laborious and unsparing efforts in the cause of truth, he fell seriously ill. The illness affected his mind, and, said his son, "It seemed afterwards as

though he were somehow a lesser man, not only intellectually, but even morally. Henceforth he seemed to be a little more irritable, grasping, self-conscious, anxious for praise. Some uncharitable people declared that now he was revealed in his true colours, that before he had been masquerading, but we who loved him at home knew better. This was not my father; my father was that former, larger man." I might have added, "Your father was more and greater even than you ever knew." As poor Robert Burns once wrote —

Thou knowest Thou hast formed me with passions wild and  
strong,  
And listening to their witching voice has often led me wrong.

My experience as a Christian minister, with the cure of souls, teaches me the overwhelming truth of that pathetic utterance of the Scottish poet, I cannot put myself in my neighbour's place. I know nothing of the predisposing influences in his case, I know nothing of the hardness of his struggle before he fell; only God knows that. Let none of us take the place of the accuser of souls, or we may hear from the great white throne the words, "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan. Take away the filthy garments from him." My message to you — and I utter it with all solemnity, believing it to be God's word — is you are not your sin. You never were. That is the filthy garment that hides the child of God. Sin is the iron gate you have closed upon

yourself, behind which your imprisoned soul cries out for life.

How shall we put into practice the exhortation of the text? Look into the life of Jesus. We are not only greater than we seem, we are the keepers of one another's souls. It would lift a great deal of the hopelessness out of the yearning sorrow that some of you feel for the wandering and the lost if you could only just look at them as Jesus did. "*When he came to himself* he said, I will arise and go to my father." Every sinner must come to himself by the feeding upon husks on this side of death or on the other, and every saviour must go on seeking while there is a sinner left. Every wanderer away into the darkness, the midnight of the soul, must return unto the Divine home to wear the diadem of victory; and you and I are God's appointed messengers to publish that truth to all the nations upon earth. That is why we ever heard it, that is why it has become a living experience to some of us. If you would save a man, you must believe in him. If he cannot believe in himself, you must make it possible for him to do it. You must help him, lift him, restore and encourage him, claim him for God, take away the filthy garments from him. That principle holds just as true of your own individual life, dear friends, those of you who feel like sinners and those of you who do not. Is there a sin taking hold upon you whose very presence is a humiliation, and which is working havoc and ruin in your soul?

Remember, you are *not* that sin, and therefore you can rise above it. Is there a weakness that you dare not confess to men, but that you have often confessed and lamented over to God? Remember, you are not that weakness, and that God's strength is yours. What, then, are you? You are a son of God, whom the Elder Brother came to seek and save. Rise, child of the Highest, claim your heritage and enter upon eternal life.

## THE ANGEL OF THE SOUL

“Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.” — ST. MATTHEW xviii. 10.

THIS passage is peculiar to St. Matthew's gospel, although it here forms part of a discourse which has its parallels in Mark and Luke, as we saw during the reading of our lesson. Although this is the only record we have of it, there can hardly be a question as to its genuineness. It accords well with the view that Jesus always took of the sacredness of child-life. In spirit and meaning it is closely akin to the beautiful saying contained in the very next chapter, “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto Me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”

This is not the first time I have preached from this text, but I think I can now see a little more deeply into its meaning than was formerly the case. The circumstances under which this sentence was first uttered appear to have been as follows: According to St. Matthew, the disciples came to Jesus asking, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” and for reply Jesus took a little child into His arms

and said, "Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." After thus speaking of the childlike quality as being necessary for the spiritual life, Jesus went on to talk about the child himself, and to warn His hearers against seeking to do harm to any such. "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."

Two questions emerge here. First, Is Jesus speaking only of child-life? Further, What does He mean by the expression, "Their angels do always behold the face of My Father"? With regard to the former of these questions, it seems to me that, although Jesus begins with a reference to child-life, He goes on to refer to human nature in general in so far as it exhibits the childlike quality. "These little ones which believe on Me" meant Peter, James, and John, and the rest of His following. They described the simple souls that followed Him and loved Him for His own sake. The "little ones" of the earth are the lowly, the obscure, the despised, the forsaken, and even the morally weak. In the heart of Jesus there was always a great compassion for such as these. He was never hard upon

those upon whom the world was hard already. The vices He most detested were cruelty and spiritual pride.

Let us understand, then, to begin with, that by the "little ones" in our text Jesus means the teeming multitudes of commonplace men and women who have no great opinion of themselves, who have never had much of a chance in this world, and who are more like ignorant, wayward children than anything else. It is of such as these that He speaks when he says, "Their angels do always behold the face of My Father." "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." The use of the word angels is no doubt a reference to the current Jewish belief in guardian angels, although probably it also meant something more. What that something more is we shall see presently. Let us first see a little as to what the contemporary belief in guardian angels was. In the earlier books of the Old Testament the term "angel" usually stands for some manifestation or expression of God Himself. It seldom means a heaven-sent messenger. The pious Israelite of primitive times did not care to use the word Jehovah too freely; hence, when he wanted to say that God had revealed Himself to him, he said that "the angel of the Lord" had appeared to him. What he meant was that in some way or other, in dream or vision, or some other fashion, God had made His will known to His worshipper. That

was the sense in which the phrase "the angel of the Lord" was first employed, as you can see from all the earlier books of the Bible. As time went on, however, the Old Testament writers began to think and to speak a little differently. They began to make a distinction between God and His messenger, and to think of Him as making use of subordinate beings for the declaration of His will. These subordinate beings they called angels. Sometimes the angel was only a God-inspired man, a prophet, a seer of truth. Sometimes he was thought of as a supernatural being, a denizen of another world, an angel as the ordinary child of to-day is taught to think of the word. Sometimes, again, the term angel was extended to cover great natural upheavals, special portents, such as earthquakes and floods. It must be in this sense, for example, that the word is employed in the well-known sentence, "He maketh His angels spirits" — that is, "He maketh his angels sweeping winds" — "His ministers a flame of fire."

In the century and a half preceding the birth of Jesus, a still further conception of the meaning and function of angels grew up. In the Book of Daniel, for instance, you will notice that nations as well as individuals are supposed to have their guardian angels. When you get home just take the Book of Daniel, turn to the tenth chapter, and read the section from verse 13 to verse 21; you will see that conception distinctly stated. The "angel" idea is



rendered in the Authorised Version of this passage as "prince." The "princes" here are supernatural beings. Every nation had its prince or guardian spirit. The guardian spirit of Israel, as you will see from this particular passage, was supposed to be the Archangel Michael. Again, Daniel is represented as saying in the lions' den, "My God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me." I have before told you how the Book of Daniel came to be written, and of the fact that it is drama, a beautiful story, written, like "Uncle Tom's Cabin," to hearten the people in a time of national struggle and distress. Of course, this does not detract in the least from the value of the book — quite the contrary. In the apocryphal literature which belongs to this period there are numerous references to the popular belief in the agency of guardian spirits. No doubt the idea of a guardian angel for every nation was the outcome of the gradually clarifying monotheism of Israel. You all know that the early Israelites believed in Jehovah as their tribal God, just as other nations had their own gods. When under the influence of the great prophets they came to think of Jehovah as the God of the whole earth, the deities of the various nations sank in popular view into the position of guardian angels. By the time that Jesus came the belief in guardian angels of all sorts was widely accepted. The Sadducees did not believe in them, but practically all the com-

mon people did, and Jesus Himself appears to have done so, as we learn not only from this passage, but from others like it, such as, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Read in the light of contemporary belief, therefore, the obvious meaning of the beautiful passage which is our text was as follows: "Do not be so foolish as to despise the poor, the lowly, the weak, or those upon whom the burden of life presses heavily. These are God's little ones. They are dear to Him, although they seem to be of so little account in this world. He watches over them and cares for their welfare. He does not wish any of them to perish on the way to the everlasting kingdom of His love and joy. In heaven their place is already prepared, and the guardians of their destiny, the angels of God, behold with unveiled face the glory of the Lord." Plainly this is a poetic expression of a great truth.

Jesus had a poet's mind. I am sure you will not object to my saying that. I repeat, Jesus had a poet's mind, a fact which distinguishes Him from the best of His immediate followers. For instance, in the course of his missionary journeys the Apostle Paul passed through some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, but in his writings he never says a word about it. How different with Jesus! He was interested in everything beautiful that came under His notice, both in nature and in human life. He talks about the lilies of the field, the birds

of the air, the sheep on the hillsides, the widow who cast her mite into the treasury; and, when He wanted an illustration of the spirit that was likest God's, He took a little child between His knees and bade His bearded followers look at him. They were only children themselves, and He wanted them to see how beautiful was childlike simplicity. Yes, Jesus had the poet's vision, and everything spoke to Him of God.

But does this poetic statement about guardian angels mean no more than I have said so far? Are we simply to understand on the authority of Jesus that we are looked after from the side of the unseen by some representative or mediator of the goodwill of God, some angel whose special work it is to see that evil does not destroy us in spite of ourselves? Well, I cannot but think that there is something more here, and that Jesus knew it and meant it. I will tell you what it is. We may or may not have a guardian spirit as distinct from ourselves. I am really not much interested in the question. My heavenly Father is guardian enough for me. But I do believe with all my heart that we, every one of us, have a higher self, a diviner being than we know, the angel of the soul, ever present before the throne of God. I would fall back on the ancient Old Testament idea, and say that this guardian self of ours is a manifestation of God Himself. It is at once His being and ours, the archetypal reality to which we in the end shall conform. It seems to

me that it is to this truth, which is thousands of years old, that Jesus was alluding in our text.

This is not an easy conception to make clear to everybody, but I will try to state it as plainly and as simply as I know how. It is far from being mere speculation, nor does it belong only to the region of Christian theology. The general tendency of the modern science of psychology goes to confirm it. Within the past ten years or so — nay, much more than that — workers in the field of human psychology have developed a theory which has come to be called the theory of the sub-conscious mind. Stated in broad general terms, it seems to be something like this: A vast amount of our ordinary mental action goes on outside the region of our consciousness altogether. We have all read recently of a distinguished lady novelist who declares that when she has selected a theme for treatment she simply turns it over to her sub-conscious mind and lets it alone for a while. Later on she finds that somehow it has matured without her conscious co-operation. Of course, she does not mean that her sub-conscious mind has saved her all hard work. Nothing of the kind. She means that it has told her what to think about a theme, and then her reason sets to work to plan it out. No less a man than Dr. Clifford told me the other night that he likes to select his subjects well in advance, for a similar reason. I can bear testimony to the same truth myself, as no

doubt most of the members of this congregation could in their own case.

The theory of sub-conscious cerebration — to employ a scientific phrase, forgive me for using it — is now so well established that it can hardly be seriously disputed. Some eminent psychologists carry the theory much farther than others do. They hold that the conscious mind is but a tiny thing as compared with the sub-conscious. They hold that the latter is infinitely the larger and the truer self. This is a startling fact if you just think of it. John Smith, who supposes that he knows all about himself, knows comparatively little: he is but the smaller portion, a tiny corner of his real personality. The truer self is in the region of the sub-conscious. The sub-conscious is the seat of inspiration and of intuition. Most of us know that we usually see a truth long before we are able to reason it out. The deeper mind flashes it to that surface mind which we call the reason, and the latter sets to work to justify it. Reason plods along on four feet, intuition soars on wings. Most of our best scientific discoveries are made in this way — first the flash of intuition, and then the slow, experimental confirmation of what has thus been seen. The best thoughts of the best minds in every field of thought come in this way, often unbidden and unanticipated. Genius itself has been described as “an uprush of subliminal faculty,” perhaps the best definition that could be given. Mind, I am not arguing for

intuition as against reason. We need both. The sub-conscious may give us some foolish things as well as some wise ones, and the function of the reason is to judge and decide upon the material presented to us. But here is the striking thing about this theory, the reason why I have mentioned it to you at all. It seems to show that human nature is far greater and more complex than is ordinarily known. The name sub-conscious is a poor one for the region thus disclosed. It would be far better to speak of it as the super-conscious. The conviction it forces upon one is this — we every one of us have a diviner self, our true being, the source of all our best inspirations, the guide and guardian of our growing souls. That diviner self may fitly be termed the angel which doth always behold the face of the Father, for it is essentially one with God Himself. Looking upon this expression of His own being, God sees us as we essentially are.

There are great questions suggested here, into which I do not propose to enter to-night, although I have my own views upon them. But it would not be honest to pass them by unmentioned. Will you kindly let me indicate three of them at least? There is the question of the true relation of the being of God to the being of man. Where does the one leave off and the other begin? What is the dividing line? Frankly, I do not believe there is any dividing line, although it seems so to our limited consciousness. Our being is God's, not some of it merely, but all

of it, although our present consciousness of it is our own. The spiritual ideal is to reach the stage when we can say with fulness of knowledge, and not merely as an act of faith, "I and my Father are one." A further and almost equally difficult question is that of the relation of the deeper self to that of which we are conscious. To all intents and purposes it would seem as though the two must be separate beings, but I do not believe they are. It only seems so to the lower, not to the higher. I must just leave the question there. The third question is that of the reason why there has ever been a lower and a higher at all. Why are we imprisoned here? Why are we surrounded with mystery even as to our true being and the meaning of our life? What good purpose is being served in the sorrow caused by ignorance or moral failure, a sorrow which every one of us is compelled sooner or later to know? These are problems upon which I have already said something in previous sermons. I do not want to spend time upon them to-night, although they cannot be ignored. Let me comprehend the answer to them in this one general statement: We are here that the eternally glorious reality which is at once our being and that of our heavenly Father may manifest its true nature. That can only be done by limiting or attenuating its resources. You all know well enough that the thing you most reverence in the life of any man is that which has made the greatest demand upon his

better nature in the presence of adverse circumstances. Some one you love is in trouble, for example, and at once you fly to the rescue. Somehow the experience is felt to be a grand one, and the sweetness of the relationship thus indicated is thereby enhanced. Everything worthy in human experience has to become manifest in this way — first the limitation, and then the great infilling of the rising tide of the Divine life. It is just this principle which has given the Cross of Christ its power over the hearts of men. As I have said before, one Paul with his thorn in the flesh, with his conflicts and disciplines, and testing times, is worth ten thousand seraphs as an expression of the innermost of God, the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Give me the Paul, and you can keep the seraph. This is a tempting theme, but I must not stay any longer upon it. All I want you to see is that these three questions are not forgotten in my consideration of the meaning of our text.

But the emphasis of the text itself is put in quite another place. The beautiful and helpful truth it contains, and which I believe Jesus really meant, is that we are one and all already ideally present in the heart of God. The lowly ones of the earth — ay, and the great ones, too — are immediately and eternally included in the glory of God. He is not on that side and we on this. His life is our life, His purpose our goal, His will our good. Here is a truth of great practical importance, and one which



will greatly help you in living your daily life if you will only give it a chance. To begin with, it should teach you charity and reverence for human nature. You see that child which is born in the slum tenement and reared in filth and penury. Ever since she was a baby she has known little but ill-usage. Blows and curses have been her daily fare. As she has grown older she has become like her sinister surroundings. She is coarse and unclean, she has developed cunning little ways, and looks upon the outside world as an enemy to be plundered. Her very face tells the story of her environment. It is not beautiful, although it is a child-face. It would be a miracle if it were beautiful. It is stamped with disease and suffering. It may even be repulsive to you at first sight. You would hardly look into those eyes for evidence of the delicacy and gentleness of pure womanhood. And yet in this poor child of poverty and shame there is something great and noble, something that speaks of heaven. Workers amongst the poorest of the poor will tell you that if you want to find spontaneous and uncalculating kindness you cannot do better than go to the slums. The rich do not know how to give, in comparison with the poor. Those who have but little in this world are generous and self-sacrificing to the last degree. The harlot will share her last crust with her hungry sister in shame. When sickness or misfortune has to be met, the poor hold together in a way that their wealthier brothers and

sisters seldom do. No doubt all this is consistent with a certain amount of selfishness and even brutality, but it really seems as though the poor, even the degraded poor, get nearer to the great heart of things than those of a more artificial kind of living are able to do. They have fewer artificialities to break through. The soul can express itself more simply. I think Jesus must have seen this when He said, "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," although "with God all things are possible." What I mean is that the poor are like children; they are simple in their perceptions, wants, desires, and feelings. Even those who have sunk lowest through privation and want often reveal something of spiritual beauty.

I do not mean to say that their poverty makes this possible. Poverty should not be. In a condition of things where every one had enough and there was no privileged order, exactly the same truth would hold good. All that I am at present contending for is that, let the outward appearance be what it may, simple souls will always reveal something of God. It is because the deeper soul is already face to face with God, and belongs to the unseen world of light and life. "Take heed that ye despise not one of these My little ones that believe on Me; for verily I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father

which is in heaven." "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Take, again, the most trying person you know, in your home or in your circle of friendship. Perhaps there is one member of your family who has always been a trial and an anxiety to the rest. You cannot rely upon his word, for although he means all his promises of amendment at the time they are made, they are only made to be broken. You can never be quite sure that he has told you all the truth about his latest escapade, whatever it may have been, and you know well the unspeakable torture of finding out again and again that you have been deceived. The presence of a character like this in an otherwise ideal home is an inexplicable problem which baffles theologians and psychologists alike. One weak, shifty, self-indulgent man will cause more pain in a home circle than the most wanton cruelty can commonly do. What are we to say about it? There is only one thing that can save a loving heart from despair in such a case, and that is that the occasional gleams of goodness and tenderness which scintillate from such a weak nature represent the truest, the deepest, and the best in him after all. Deep down below all the petty disloyalties and evasions there lives the diviner being. God give you eyes to see it, and to believe that in the end your faith and loving-kindness shall cause what is higher in him to triumph over what is lower.

“It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

I see the feet that fain would climb,  
You but the steps that turn astray;  
I see the soul unharmed, sublime,  
You but the garment and the clay.

You see a mortal weak, misled,  
Dwarfed ever by the earthly clod;  
I see how manhood perfected  
May reach the stature of a God.

The same perception will help you in all the relations of your own daily life. You will be able to recognise that your bitterest enemy is, after all, only a wayward and foolish child, and that he can do you no real harm unless you descend to the level upon which he is assailing you. If you can keep your own heart free from the taint of bitterness you will be nearer the truth not only about yourself but even about him, and in the end the higher is always stronger than the lower. Fight with the weapons of love, and you will soon find out that there is no foe; for in heaven, where the angel of the soul doth always behold the face of the Father, all is harmony. And heaven is not in some distant corner of the universe of God. It is here, it is within you, it is wherever love is, it is wherever the spirit of Christ is to be found. “Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face.” Think about this truth, then, for yourselves. When the sky grows dark and

the clouds of evil gather round your head, lift up your eyes in trust and confidence to the radiance that lies beyond the gloom and say, "All is well, for even now, let appearances be what they may, mine angel doth behold the face of my Father. Nothing that comes to me can do other than help me. Shadows cannot frighten me, and evil is powerless to crush me. My home is God."

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## THE VALLEY OF BACA

“Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well (R.V. ‘a place of springs’).” — PSALM lxxxiv. 6.

THERE is a certain obscurity surrounding this familiar passage which has never been wholly dissipated. Most of us, I suppose, have chanted it in public worship without pausing to ask ourselves what it really meant. It is the same with the Christian use of a great many of these songs of ancient Israel; we appropriate the words without being always aware of the depth and beauty of the images they suggest. I think it is so with the passage which forms our text. Every one knows it, but what idea does it convey to the mind? What does it symbolise? What is the particular spiritual experience thus described?

We may as well recognise at the outset of our examination into this subject that it is impossible to say with absolute certainty what the valley of Baca really was, and therefore we cannot be too confident as to the meaning of the figure suggested by the use of the name. But for all that I think we have ground for believing that the truth thus indicated is fairly obvious. You will see presently what I mean by saying this. The traditional interpreta-

tion of this passage has been "the valley of weeping," but why the valley of weeping no one seems to know. There have been a good many attempts to identify the place thus referred to. The Psalm suggests that it was a locality through which pilgrims had to pass on their way to the national festivals at Jerusalem. Apparently the poet has one of these pilgrimages in mind, although he is not able to take part in it himself. Thus he writes in the fifth verse, "Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; *in whose heart* are the highways to Zion." Unable to form one of the company who are going up to worship at the Temple, he follows the procession with his mind's eye, as it were, and turns it into a figure of the spiritual life. His desire to go is real and intense, as is evident from the opening verses: "How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Every pious and patriotic Jew felt more or less like this on the occasion of the great national festivals. But our poet does not content himself with wishing he could be one of the throng of worshippers in Solomon's glorious Temple. He sees that life is a pilgrimage anyhow, and that the way to the highest experience of the love and goodness of God often lies through toil and care as well as through brightness and joy. But he sees, too, that every one of the happenings of life, the welcome and the unwelcome, the glad

and the painful, may be so appropriated as to become the means of abundant blessing leading to clearer vision of God. Authorities are not agreed as to the exact location of the valley of Baca. Some have identified it with the valley of Achor, which has sinister associations; others with the valley wherein David inflicted a severe defeat on the Philistines, as recorded in 2 Sam. v. 22. Renan, the great French author and critic, believed it to be the last station of the caravan route from the north to Jerusalem. But, wherever it was, it was probably a bare and desert place, without water, and therefore without beauty. The thought of the Psalmist thus becomes one of touching sweetness and suggestiveness. He regards the man of faith as a spreader of blessing. He turns a wilderness into a fruitful land, and causes springs to gush forth where none but he could find them. The place of death becomes transformed at his touch into a scene of abundant life; sorrow becomes love and joy.

An obvious illustration of the truth the Psalmist has in mind was suggested to me only the other day. I have been told that the colony of British Columbia, on the Pacific slope of the Rocky Mountains, contained at one time a number of cañons, or deep valleys, which were entirely devoid of verdure owing to the absence of water. The soil was rich enough to grow anything, but owing to this particular lack it presented the appearance of a barren wilderness. But within comparatively recent years certain lusty



pioneers have come along who have bored deep shafts beneath the arid surface of these various valleys and come upon the much-needed water supply, with the consequence that, one after another, these scenes of death have been filled with luxuriant life and beauty. The comparison between the valley of Baca and these unpromising districts of British Columbia is quite felicitous, because the conditions appear to have been exactly the same in both. In either case what was wanted was that some one should come along with sufficient faith and energy to turn a dry and cheerless land into "a place of springs" — for this is the literal translation of the phrase "make it a well." It is because the valley becomes "a place of springs" that it becomes a place of smiling plenty.

Few will be inclined to dispute the correctness of this view of the poet's meaning. The valley of Baca is a desert place — a place of weeping, if you like — but the spiritual man, the man of faith, is able to draw from such arid experiences their hidden meaning, so that the desert is made to "rejoice and blossom as the rose." I think this is a very beautiful conception, and one which compels us to reverence this unknown singer of a far-off day, whoever he may have been. For it is just as true to-day as it was when he wrote, and I think it will repay us to try to apply it to the conditions under which we live our own lives. Keep before your minds the figure of the pilgrimage which is suggested here.

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interest has no place, peace of heart is impossible. I have noticed over and over again that the modes in which this self-thought can intrude are often very subtle. The fumings of the strong, ambitious man, for instance, are at bottom due to exactly the same cause as the neurotic religious doubts of some school-girl who is so interested in her self-induced agonies of mind that she fancies every one else must be equally so. It is often an extremely difficult thing to make such people see that their self-consciousness is at the bottom of most of their troubles. If one could only cut them free from it spiritual progress would become possible.

This it is which makes the valley of Baca a valley of weeping for them. It becomes a place of springs from which hidden beauties and joy arise just as soon as they become able to fix their gaze upon their goal instead of upon themselves. More than once I have ventured to say to people who have been worrying about the state of their soul, "Let your soul alone, and set to work to gladden the world. You will find your soul by losing sight of it." I am quite sure this is true, as any one may see. The worst kind of sorrow is that in which a man is unable to get away from himself. You will often come across people who are so completely self-absorbed that they are cruel to others without ever dreaming that it is so. You will see trouble come into a family, and some member of that family — the head of it, perhaps — instead of trying to lighten the load for

the rest will talk as if he had to bear it all. It is his sensations, his woes, his aching heart that are occupying his attention all the time. His valley of Baca is dreary enough, but he makes it so by his self-pity; by withholding the balm of healing from others he fails to draw upon the hidden springs of comfort and strength which wait untouched within his own soul.

On the other hand, how beautiful it often is to see a group of mourners drawn together by a common sympathy in such a way that every one becomes stronger and holier by the endeavour to minister to the good of the rest. Probably there is nothing on this side of eternity which more closely resembles heaven than the experience in which two or more souls become one in the brave and loyal sharing of a common sorrow. Thus Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler speaks of "those sacred seasons, known to most of us, when those who have come back from the gates of the grave combine the pathetic sacredness of the dead with the sweet familiarity of the living, and we feel that we never can be angry with their faults or irritated by their follies any more." A father has told me before now that in a time of terrible misfortune the one thing that sustained him was the loyal devotion of his only son. It was, he declared, almost worth while going through the experience because of the way in which it drew forth from that boy the wealth of tender strength which he had at command, but which had never been needed before. But how differently people

act in such cases! It is an old saying that when poverty comes in at the door love flies out at the window, and so indeed he often does. Then it is that the valley of Baca is felt to be hard and bare; there is no love to draw upon the Divine springs which lie beneath even the most forbidding of earthly experiences. How sad it is that so many of us should deliberately choose the baser instead of the better part, and should be content to make life a weary pilgrimage rather than a gladsome and triumphal progress from strength to strength. Deep down beneath our feet in every valley of pain there lie God's springs of joy. Faith can find them, and love can make them overflow. If any of you who are now listening to me are in danger of making the mistake I have just indicated, let me urge you to take care ere it be too late, and you have wasted your life in needless fretting and striving against what ought never to have existed. Beyond a doubt there are plenty of people here who are wretched because they are helping to keep the valley of Baca dreary and bare in their own home and their own heart. The very conditions against which you protest so earnestly represent God's call to you to do something to manifest His love. The grandest antidote for all your heart-burnings is to set to work to make life more tolerable for those about you. It can hardly be otherwise than that, if you do, the peace of God will possess your own soul, and the joy of the Lord shall be your strength.

But the subject takes an even wider range when we think of the valley of Baca as the world — I mean the world as it appears to any individual man or woman. The world as you know it is not the world as I know it, and even though we may live in the very same place, and have the very same people to deal with, our outlook upon them may be different. But to every one of us the world is the world, a stage on the road from one unknown to another. Few of us would like to think that the world to come, whatever it may be, will be on the whole a sadder or darker place than this; this is a veritable valley of Baca. All around us are the sighs and groans of those who are “weary of the greatness of the way.” There are many people who are tired of life, tired because it seems so aimless and disappointing. When a man is robbed of the incentive to strong endeavour he is sure to think of the world as a valley of Baca: before him stretches the long dusty path that leads through the desert in the pitiless heat until it vanishes in the night of death. There are some who on the march to Zion, the home of the soul, never see an inch beyond the valley of Baca. We all know people like that, people with whom life is over, although to all appearance it has many years to run.

And then, who can avoid seeing that the world is a valley of Baca, a place of weeping, to thousands with whom it might have been the dwelling-place of joy? And often it seems such a little thing that

makes the difference. In this respect high and low, rich and poor, are far nearer together than they think. As a Christian minister it falls to my lot to meet all sorts and conditions of men, and I have often been profoundly impressed by the fact that external conditions have almost nothing to do with a man's happiness and interest in life.

How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which laws and kings can cause or cure.

Have we never felt, for instance, the curious sense of unreality that comes over us in a season of great distress of mind when we look forth from the darkened chamber of our heart upon the busy, noisy world outside? Perhaps your hearth has been left unto you desolate, and yet the butcher will call for orders, you will hear the street boys calling the latest news in the evening papers, you will hear the happy laughter of passers by on their way to some scene of excitement. It all seems so remote, so ghostly, so altogether apart from what you are and feel. And the change in outlook can come with appalling suddenness too. All in a moment a man may be struck down by a blow from which he never recovers. Yesterday your world was like some fruitful, smiling landscape; to-day it lies before you, a valley of Baca, a place of deadness, strewn with the ashes of ruined hopes as though from some volcanic eruption. The monarch on the throne is no more secure from such a visitation than the labourer in the cottage.



But yesterday the word of Cæsar might  
Have stood against the world; now lies he there,  
And none so poor to do him reverence.

Ah yes; there are thousands in this land to-day whom the world deems fortunate, but whom no one need envy. What seems to others a pathway strewn with roses is to them only a valley of Baca.

Then there are some to whom life has never been much else than a valley of Baca, rough and stony, arid and bare. Some of you, I dare say, have known little but struggle all your lives, and struggle which has brought with it but little profit. Every time of new beginnings has been but a fresh acquaintance with toil and disappointment. Nothing has ever quite succeeded. No sooner have you gained the hard-won prize of effort bravely made than it has been wrested from you by circumstances unforeseen. The future has always been mortgaged to some sinister claim or other which you can neither repudiate nor satisfy. I might go on multiplying examples of the way in which the world as a whole may seem a valley of Baca to different minds for different reasons, but what I really want to point out is that what we have to do is to recognise that whatever belongs to one belongs to all, and that there is no such thing as an isolated good or evil. Never let a desolation draw you away from mankind. That chattering world that seems so remote is not remote at all; it is so near as actually to be within your own heart. Let every sharp discipline help to open the well-springs of human sympathy; never

let it close them. So shall your valley of Baca become a resting-place for other weary feet. You need ask no greater destiny than to know that the way you have trodden has been made easier for others by your faithfulness and truth. It is comparatively seldom that one finds a human being whose own trials have become sacraments to other people, but to meet such is a benediction. To such people every deepening of experience becomes a means of refreshing and renewing the face of the world for fellow pilgrims. Wherever they tread flowers spring up, hope recovers, and faith returns. Nor does the effort go unrewarded. It was this that Jesus meant when He said: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again." This is a law of the Divine life which works unerringly, and you can trust it.

And if in thy life on earth,  
In the chamber or by the hearth,  
'Mid the crowded city's tide,  
Or high on the lone hillside;  
Thou canst cause a thought of peace,  
Or an aching thought to cease,  
Or a gleam of joy to burst  
On a soul in sadness nurst;  
Spare not thy hand, my child:  
Though the gladdened should never know  
The well-spring amid the wild,  
Whence the waters of blessing flow.

## SWEETENING THE WATERS OF MARAH

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.” — EXODUS xv. 23-25.

THE striking miracle recorded in these words and described so simply and tellingly in the immediate context has given rise to a good deal of speculation among biblical students in time past. It cannot truthfully be said that we know, beyond all possibility of doubt, what was the phenomenon thus referred to, but I think we may fairly take for granted that the incident itself was historical, not merely legendary. In saying this, I am aware that I have against me not merely the weighty opinion of some Old Testament scholars, but also the attitude of the modern scientific mind. Still, somehow I cannot resist the impression that what is here described actually took place. You know the story. The Israelites in their journey across

the Sinaitic peninsula came to a district where the only water obtainable was so bitter as to be unfit for drinking purposes. They complained to their great leader, who, under Divine guidance, discovered a tree which, when thrown into the waters, had the power of removing the bitterness and rendering them palatable. Now I always like to try to get beneath a statement of this kind, and see, if I can, what it arose from. Well, to begin with, it seems to be a fact that in the district thus indicated there were some bitter springs. It is impossible to fix the locality with precision, but the Old Testament is not our only evidence as to the existence of such springs. They can be found to-day in various parts of the world, and, as you know, possess medicinal properties in some cases. This part of the story, at any rate, is quite believable. A similar story is recorded concerning the march of Alexander the Great.

As to the rest of the narrative, we have little more than conjecture to guide us, but there is an intrinsic probability in the statement that Moses was able to sweeten the water by throwing into it certain vegetable growths. Properly speaking, this was no miracle at all, but the application of knowledge gained by the Israelitish leader during his long sojourn in Arabia. The same might be said of any so-called miracle; it is only the operation of Divine law in what is to us an unaccustomed way. Things are taking place around us every day of our lives

which would have seemed stupendous miracles to our forefathers, but which to us are the veriest commonplaces. What would the Israelites have thought of the motor-car, the telephone, or wireless telegraphy? Any chemist can turn fluids sweet or bitter, wholesome or unwholesome, at his pleasure, without changing their appearance in the least. I say, then, that apparent miracle is only the operation of Divine law in a way to which we have not hitherto been accustomed. No doubt it was so in the sweetening of the waters of Marah. To Moses it would not seem the miracle that it seemed to his simple followers.

But then this was not the whole of the matter. Moses did depend upon Divine wisdom and power at every step of his wonderful march, and his faith justified itself by results. There is a beautiful touch introduced here in this ancient narrative — one of the earliest in Old Testament literature, by the way — which shows that this was the view which Moses took of the matter. We are told in the verses which immediately follow our text that this true father of his people tried to teach the Israelites the value of sweet and quiet dependence upon God. “There he [that is, Moses] made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them, and said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His sight, and wilt give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will

put none of the diseases upon thee which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee." There is something very tender and helpful about this spiritual application of the incident of the sweetening of the waters of Marah. I like to think that it is a genuine tradition, and represents what a great and good man such as Moses would wish to say about such a remarkable incident. "I am the Lord that healeth thee," was the spiritual explanation of a material benefit.

I have chosen this text this evening because of a desire of which I have long been conscious to press upon your attention the truth that God does operate in wonderful ways through every spiritual experience in the sweetening of the waters of bitterness if we will only let Him do it. The longer I live the more I become convinced that there is no limit to the gracious dealings of God with any soul that trusts Him. The greater our demand upon His bounty, the greater the response. "God is a very present help in time of trouble." Life is one long miracle to the child of God. Everything is made to contribute to the upbuilding of the soul if we only expect it. It is foolish to think that we are meant to go on drinking the waters of bitterness when they might become the gushing fountains of eternal life. It is difficult to know how to put the case strongly enough, but suppose we try to do it this way: God is eternal life, love, and joy. These things are the heritage of His people, and we ought

to claim them. There is no reason why our earthly experience should be one of sorrow and dread and bitterness of spirit. To live in this way is an entire mistake, but it is one that a good many of us are making.

Take the average business man in this assembly. I dare say you have a great deal to try you in the ordinary affairs of life, and the more sensitively you happen to be organised the greater will be your reaction to the stimulus of pain. Some of you hardly ever know anything else than worry and disturbance of mind. Things are always wrong at the office, and worse perhaps at home. Maybe you hate your occupation, and wish you could get away from it. Or you would like to exchange with some one else, or come into possession of just that one thing more which would deliver you from your present difficulties and dangers. There is always some kind of a shadow on your horizon, something to be afraid of, something to cause sadness and disappointment. Sometimes you wish you had your neighbour's equable frame of mind, and could take life as easily as he does; but then perhaps this equableness of his is conjoined to a nature that is content with the flesh-pots of Egypt and never wants to go in search of any promised land. A bookmaker on the turf may find life very interesting from his point of view, and not at all unprofitable; he may be very good-natured in his way, and regard the world as quite a desirable

place to live in. *He* does not trouble his head about the ultimate problems of existence, and I dare say he wonders why on earth any one else ever should. How different from the conscientious, irritable, chronically anxious man of ideals who wants to do the best he can with the present for the sake of that deeper meaning which he believes underlies all the perplexing experiences which go to make up life! I take it that a good many of you belong to this latter class. You desire to take life seriously, but you find it no easy thing to do so and retain your sweetness of spirit. What a number of you, even in the discharge of the ordinary duties of the ordinary day, are drinking continually of the waters of Marah!

Then, too, there are, to be sure, the tragedies of life in which we are all sooner or later called to share. No doubt some of you are passing through yours just now, and life is very bitter in consequence. You may have been the victim of a great betrayal or some irretrievable loss that has left the soul poor and dark. Even some of the strongest characters of earth have occasionally to encounter circumstances which would try the strongest nerve or break the stoutest heart. The deeper the nature the greater its capacity for pain. It needs some measure of moral greatness before a soul can suffer greatly. It may well be, therefore, that there are some now listening to me who are so constituted as to feel deeply what to a shallower soul would be no afflic-



tion at all. "The heart knoweth its own bitterness." The more strongly you feel the grandeur and solemnity of life, the more you must necessarily feel the ruin of exalted hopes and aims, if such has been your lot. Many of you are like pilgrims in the wilderness of Sinai. Long ago you left behind you the life of bondage to low ideals and material interests. You set your face towards wider experiences and nobler realities, and journeyed on in the expectation of reaching something, but you seem as far off from it as ever.

You will admit that this is more or less the way in which the average man lives his life in these busy days of ours. Perhaps, to be more accurate, I ought to say the average man who takes life seriously and recognises that it means more than eating, drinking, sleeping, getting money, and enjoying yourself.

But in the nature of things is there any inherent necessity why life should be lived in this way? Is it true, as is so generally taken for granted, that this world is a vale of tears, and that, do what we will, we must expect to live under the shadow of sorrow during the greater part of our earthly career? I do not believe it, and yet I hope I do not take a very superficial view of life. A cowardly avoidance of the bitter things of life is one thing, a weak submission to them is quite another. I believe God has meant us to taste of the waters of Marah, but I am equally sure that He did not mean us to go on

drinking them. It is a pitiful thing that so many thousands of good, well-meaning men and women are allowing their moral energies to lie unused to-day because they do not know, or do not seem to know, that God's will for them is not sorrow but joy, not pain but peace, not weakness but strength. You will sometimes hear good people speaking as though trouble and distress of mind were a good thing sent by God as a means of blessing, although we may not be able to see it. There is of course a sense in which this is quite true, but the statement ought not to be accepted without the most careful qualification. Pain in itself is not a good, but an evil; at the best it is only a call towards a good. I am quite convinced that the attitude of the average Christian towards the ills of life, in theory at any rate, is a mistaken one. It is not our duty to submit to pain or to suppose that it necessarily represents the will of God for us. If people choose to live in a pestilential atmosphere they are sure to suffer for it, but it would be a great mistake to call this suffering the will of God; it is only the will of God in the sense that He desires us to overcome the evil. After all, pain is disharmony; it shows that something needs adjusting in the experience of the soul. It is Divine life trying to get through, and we ought to see that it does get through. Never lie down before an evil, or believe that it is God's will that the light of your hope should be extinguished in the waters of affliction. Take it for granted that when

suffering arrives on the scene the love of God is calling you to rise to some higher plane of experience. Treat the suffering as an enemy and assail it as from the side of God. Suffering can only be called your friend when it calls forth from you the latent resources of your being. It is your friend in the same sense that anything is your friend which drives you from lesser into larger life.

I would say, therefore, to any one in this place to whom trouble has come: Do not believe for a moment that it is the will of God that you should be crushed by that trouble. There is always something that will sweeten the waters of Marah, and the prayer of simple faith will lead you to it. It is a great gain to be able to recognise that this remedy exists and that you can find it. Life is hard for most of you, I am sure; you cannot afford to take it lightly; but if you can understand, like Moses the man of God, that Divine wisdom and love are directing you in all your pilgrimage, you will find that you are equal to every emergency as it arises. Get hold of this one thought: that God does not mean you to be weakened and impoverished by any affliction, however great; His desire for you is that you should live in the fellowship of holy love and joy. Pain should never be regarded as anything other than the stimulus to fuller exertion and higher reaches of attainment.

Supposing, then, that I am addressing some young fellow who feels grievously discouraged by his

present experience of life and finds himself in desponding mood, I would say: My dear lad, you neither know yourself nor God. What do you think Moses would have done in your place? What do you suppose Jesus would do? Think of the noblest man you ever knew, and ask whether he could be broken or defeated by the events which have mastered you. You are like those mariners who, perishing of thirst and signalling for water to a passing ship, received the answer, "Let down your buckets and drink; you are in the Amazon." You carry within you all that is required to render you master of your fate. Believe that God is seeking to bless the world through you, and that He will do it. Remember that He dwells within you now, and that His life is the source and sustenance of your being. Believe that what has ever been possible to any child of God in the conflict with evil is possible to you. Cease to dwell upon the bitterness of your lot, and turn with quiet confidence to the love which is the fundamental reality of all existence. "Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart."

We have all observed from time to time that the real difference between man and man in this world consists not so much in their circumstances as in themselves. One man has a quiet inner consciousness of power, and all doors fly open at his touch; another trembles at every shadow, and accomplishes nothing. One is cheerful and strong in the face

of adversity; another is so weakened by the chill blasts of misfortune that he becomes unequal to the struggle of life. Nothing is more common than to see one man lose heart under what to another would only have been a spur to further effort. Unquestionably too it is the man of faith who does things — and I use the word in its widest sense. One simple child of God like George Müller will do more for his generation than a thousand well-endowed people of apparently larger opportunities, but who live their lives on a lower plane. To such a man as George Müller the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and every event has a Divine meaning. It was said of the late Mr. Spurgeon that he looked upon every tiny flower as a direct creative act of God, as indeed it is; it does not weaken this belief in the least to recognise that

All's love, yet all's law.

A friend of mine, an Anglican clergyman, told me the other day of a peculiar experience of his own which taught him a beautiful lesson. He was kneeling in the chancel of his church, gazing upon the form of the Christ in the stained glass window behind the altar, when all at once he seemed to see the figure raise its hand as if to summon him to approach. At first he thought his senses must have deceived him, but the movement was repeated, and this time he saw that it was an appearance caused by the gentle tossing of the branch of a tree outside

the window, which made it seem as though the Christ in the picture were actually alive and calling to His worshipper. My friend was so impressed by the suggestiveness of the incident that he wrote the following lines and sent them to me :

Subdued by mystic glamour of the scene  
And loth to let the bright illusion go,  
I pondered thankfully how it might mean  
That all the fair created things we know,  
Common as wind and sunshine, none the less  
Reveal the moving of Christ's Hand to bless.

The healthful life on mountain, moor, and sea,  
All toil or joy where useful deeds are done,  
In spheres immense of man's activity —  
These are not Christless; all true life is one,  
Disclosing still, for hearts that understand,  
Blessings and beckonings of that mighty Hand.

How absolutely true! There is nothing insignificant in life, nothing that does not belong to God. Instead of kneeling by the waters of affliction in useless lament, rise and watch for the beckoning hand which will guide you to what can sweeten them. Your problem, whatever it is, is God's too. "When He giveth quietness who then can make trouble?" "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" "Behold, the Lord's arm is not shortened that it cannot save, neither His ear heavy that it cannot hear."

## BELIEVING PRAYER

“All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” — MATTHEW xxi. 22.

THIS emphatic saying of Jesus appears in a rather strange setting. It forms the concluding verse in Matthew's account of the cursing of the barren fig tree, a story which is told with greater fulness of detail in Mark's version. According to Mark, Jesus, on His way from Bethany to Jerusalem, approached a certain fig tree in the hope of finding some fruit to satisfy His hunger, but was disappointed, whereupon He exclaimed, “No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever.” Mark then goes on to tell the story of the day's doings. This was the day on which Jesus cleansed the Temple from the money-changers and victim sellers. After this trying and exciting experience, Jesus returned to Bethany for the night, and, so Mark tells us, took His way to Jerusalem again the next morning. When the little party passed the fig tree to which He had directed attention on the previous day, the disciples found that it was withered up from the roots. Peter, surprised at this, commented upon it, and Jesus in response went on to bid him have faith in God, and to declare that such faith would

move mountains. He concluded His address by saying: "All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them."

This is a completer version of the circumstances under which the words of our text came to be spoken than Matthew's is, and throws a considerable light upon them. Evidently Matthew's version is not an exact copy of Mark's, although in substance the same, a fact which goes far to establish the utterance as being authentic. Where Matthew has, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing ye shall receive," Mark has, "Believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." Mark's version of the saying is even more striking and emphatic than Matthew's, but either of them is remarkable. Notwithstanding the fact that they differ so widely in form, they mean much the same thing, and therefore it is evident that what Jesus said impressed His hearers so deeply that they remembered it perfectly, although perhaps they did not preserve the actual words. Admitting, then, that we have here a genuine saying of Jesus, what can it possibly mean? Is it actually true that the things we ask for in perfect faith come to us with unerring certainty? I think there are a good many of us who would hesitate before giving an unqualified affirmative to that question.

The circumstances under which the words were spoken give the clue to their meaning. Let us look



at them a little more closely. Do you really believe, any of you, that Jesus was so unreasonable as to curse a tree because He expected to find fruit on it and was disappointed? Mark expressly tells us that the time of figs was not yet; so, even if the tree were endowed with consciousness and a sense of moral responsibility, it could not be held blameworthy for bearing leaves instead of fruit. It is childish to suppose that Jesus blighted it because He was angry with it. My belief is that we have here an acted parable, but probably not a miracle. There is a fig tree in my garden, and I notice that every year the fruit precedes the leaves. At the present moment not a leaf is visible, but the fruit is already forming. The function of the leaves is to protect and shelter the ripening fruit. When Jesus saw leaves on the barren fig tree He knew that the fruit ought already to be there, even though it was too early to expect that it should be ripe. When He found none He saw at once what was the matter: the tree was rotten and dying. Hence His words were not so much a curse as a prophecy: No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. The next morning the prophecy was found to be fulfilled. I have seen a similar thing happen in an hour on a hot summer's day to a bush that had not sufficient stamina to carry its burden of luxuriance.

But was there not something else in the mind of Jesus as He looked upon this dying tree, and is not that something else the reason why Mark inserts

the story of the cleansing of the Temple before he finishes his account of the fate of the barren fig tree? I think Jesus saw in this incident a figure of the impending doom of His country and her religion. The Jewish nation was like the barren fig tree. It had produced ordinances and ceremonies of the most elaborate character. Never were the externals of religion better attended to than at the time when priests and Pharisees crucified Jesus. But these were nothing but leaves. The Temple ought to have been the shelter of the ripening fruit of noble and exalted spiritual experience, but that fruit was absent. Jesus realised this with bitter sorrow, and saw in the dying fig tree an emblem of it all.

But He also saw something more. He saw that at the darkest and the worst God could and would provide Himself with suitable instruments for the realisation of His holy will. So as Jesus watched the star of Israel setting in darkness and materialism, He turned with quiet hope and confidence to the simple men beside Him. Here was the new Israel, the spiritual Israel who should bring mankind to God. Now as always, God had chosen the weak things of the earth to confound the mighty. Hence his exhortation to Peter and his companions was in substance something like this: The work of Israel is over; she is like the barren fig tree; she is perishing for lack of moral power. God is now calling you to do the work which she ought to have done and to witness Him to the world. "Fear not,

little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Be brave and strong. Have faith in God for everything. Give your lives up to Him to be used for this holy work, and believe that all you need in doing it will be supplied if you ask for it. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing ye shall receive."

From this examination of the subject it becomes evident that Jesus was not speaking vaguely of any kind of prayer prayed by any kind of man. He meant specially and definitely the prayer of the man whose whole life was dedicated to God and whose vocation it was to help to realise the kingdom of love. You may say at once that this ought to include all men, and so indeed it ought, but it does not. Very few people are found willing to make themselves living sacrifices to the will of God and the good of man. It is only here and there that some individual stands out who is willing to make the whole-hearted offering of himself to this ideal. Then, again, the ideal shapes itself differently to one man as compared with the way in which it presents itself to another, and this difference constitutes the individual vocation. It was Luther's vocation to rouse the slumbering conscience of Europe against the immoral practices of ecclesiastical Rome. It was Abraham Lincoln's vocation to proclaim liberty to a subject race on the American continent. It was John Bright's vocation to demand for the starving poor in England the bread

which was being held away from them by specially imposed restrictions. But the point is that in every such case the conviction that one is called to do a certain work for God carries with it the promise that everything necessary for the doing of that work will be supplied from the illimitable stores of the all-Father at the call of His servant. This was just the position in which Peter and his companions stood at the time when Jesus made this impressive promise. There were only eleven of them all told, if we leave Judas out of count, and yet these eleven were the new Israel which was to spread the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. This was their task, and we know how they accomplished it. It is because of their faithful witness, unselfish zeal, and noble sufferings that we are here to-day. But when they started, the disparity between their apparent resources and the work to be accomplished must have seemed absolutely ridiculous. Here were they, eleven unlearned Galilean peasants, against the world. Who would take any notice of them? Who were they to speak in the name of truth and righteousness? Principalities and powers were not as yet arrayed against them, for they did not even know of their existence. But they believed their Master, and they could see that He was right. The soul had fled from Israel. For long she had been producing nothing but leaves, and now the ancient tree was dying, rotten to the core. Where was God to be found if not with Jesus? When

therefore Jesus told them that they must take up Israel's work, they accepted the commission in the confidence that God was with them. What they had now to do was to look to Him as to a never-failing friend for all that they might need in the discharge of the arduous task which had been put upon them.

This was the way in which they understood the promise as Jesus made it, and the circumstances attending it must have served to make it very impressive. Viewed from this standpoint, it becomes not only reasonable, but a matter which has been tested over and over again and abundantly verified by experience. I do not shrink from asserting without shadow of hesitation that this promise is being fulfilled in the world to-day in exactly the same way as it was fulfilled in the experience of Peter, James, and John. Can any one explain the life of George Müller? A good many people have tried to do so by appealing to the phenomena of telepathy, the force of a concentrated will, and such like; but the only rational explanation is that here was a man with a vocation, and he looked to God continually for the power to fulfil it. Can any man explain John Wesley? Every opprobrious epithet that could be applied to a human being was flung at him during the time when he was doing his noblest work for God. If he had been a devil incarnate, intent only upon doing all the harm in his power to poor human kind, he could not have been treated

worse. As a matter of fact, the devil incarnate is not usually treated very badly at all. It is a strange law of human nature that the man who does his best for the world should be treated as though he were its enemy, to be crushed at any cost, but so it generally is. But the most remarkable thing about Wesley was his calm confidence in God. He applied it to all circumstances, small and great. On one occasion a mob dragged him about all night long in order to find some satisfactory means of putting him to death with ignominy. In the morning they let him go because they were getting afraid of him. He had shown no trace of fear, not even of excitement. He was just as quiet in their brutal hands as though he had been alone with his heavenly Father. They had never seen a man like this before, and so they thought it best to let him alone. Is there any explanation of this other than that the promise of our text was fulfilled in the experience of one more servant of the living God?

I want you to see that there is a spiritual law here which works with unerring precision. Granted that you have God's work to do, and are utterly unselfish about it; granted that your self-interest has become swallowed up in your vocation, and you have no personal ends to serve, how can your prayer for Divine assistance ever fail? Why, your whole life is a prayer. What you want is precisely what God wants, and your prayer is a means of giving Him His opportunity through you. People have

such strange ideas about prayer. The ordinary man who believes or disbelieves in the efficacy of prayer does so on the ground that it is supposed to persuade God to do something which otherwise He would not have been willing to do. The man who believes in prayer appeals to his experience as a proof of the fact that God does listen to and honour the requests of His children, while the man who disbelieves in it points out that thousands of agonising prayers have seemed to go unheeded. Both are right in the appeal to experience, but neither of them realises the full truth about the subject. If God is all-wise as well as benevolent, it is foolish and dangerous to expect that a finite mind can or ought to change His purposes. Perfect wisdom is more reliable than yours, and perfect love is always sure to do the best that can be done. Grasp this truth clearly before we go any farther. Prayer cannot change God, and ought not to change Him, for it is impossible to improve on what He already desires for humanity.

But then, some one will exclaim, it is no use praying. All we have to do is to leave things to God without concerning ourselves about what happens. Not so fast. On the contrary, if you once realise clearly that it is impossible to improve on what God already means for you, you will pray harder than ever, and you will have a full and unshaken confidence that your prayers are certain to be answered. Praying is the most important thing you can do.

The success of all your efforts for good depends upon your power in prayer. Let me show you what I mean. During last summer not a few of the smaller towns of this country were in danger of a water famine because of the defectiveness of their arrangements for a proper supply. Wells ran dry and tanks were soon exhausted. In more than one such case measures had to be promptly taken to convey the water from some natural reservoir at a distance and apply it to the immediate needs of the thirsty townspeople. I saw one lowland town in Scotland which had thus been supplied from a highland loch. But that water had been there long before the town itself was; it had been there for ages, a practically inexhaustible source of supply. It only needed to be drawn upon, and was always ready to flow in obedience to its own law if opportunity had been given to it. Here were the inhabitants of a township suffering for want of what actually existed long before they did. Nothing could be done without water; with it all other activities became possible.

Here is a figure of the spiritual life. We are here to express God, to do His will. He is ever waiting to refresh the world with love, power, and joy. All history represents the incoming of God to the life of the world. Wherever He finds opportunity He will, in accordance with the law of His own being, give and do the best. That best already exists for every one of us, and always has existed; it is eternal. You cannot so much as imagine a want which is



not already supplied in the eternal purpose. What we dwellers in the lowlands have to do is to draw upon the highland reservoir.

The wells of your finite resources soon run dry, but the resources of God are infinite. God cannot force his bounty upon us. If He could there would be nothing of human goodness left. The very essence of goodness consists in the giving of the self to the universal love and the attempt to realise impersonal ends. This necessitates a deliberate and conscious appeal to the Infinite, and God requires that appeal to be made, otherwise there could be no such thing as human nobleness and love. But when, with an unselfish purpose in your heart, you seek to draw upon the universal love for the means wherewith to express that love in the world, you can be perfectly confident that you will get what you ask for, and even more than you ask for; for your prayer supplies opportunity for the operation of a great spiritual law. This is what explains the power of such lives as those of George Müller and John Wesley, as well as all the humble and unheard-of saints of God who only live to do good and find their highest joy in doing it.

Now go back to your homes and try whether what I am now saying is not true. Do not pray to God only now and then and for special things. Pray all the time and in everything. Pray without ceasing. Keep on constantly turning towards the Infinite and asking for strength to realise the best,

and you will find your life marvellously enriched. Understand as definitely as ever you can that there is nothing whatever of which you can think or desire but is already prepared for you in the eternal wisdom and love. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." Therefore "ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Do not be ashamed to go to God with the tiniest needs as well as the greatest. Viewed from the side of God, there is nothing either great or small. You have a work to do and a life to live for Him. Your work is to express some aspect of the eternal love and to conform your life to it; therefore, no matter what may be wanted for the realisation of this ideal, it is here now, here in the heart of God, waiting to be claimed. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him."

I say this is a perfectly glorious truth, and ought to send us to our knees with a glad confidence that no true prayer can ever go without its answer, for God cannot deny Himself. The prayer of love inspired by faith must unquestionably command the resources of infinite love from whence it came. Try it in trouble, and see how it will help you. Some one dear to you is dying, and you cannot bear the thought of life without him. Well, if you will think a moment you will realise that you do not wish him to live always in this prison-house called

earth. What you really want is the continued comfort and inspiration of his presence and love. But seeing these things came from God, cannot God compensate you for the temporary loss of them? Your friend is going up higher, and God is going to lift you higher, too, here and now, by means of this light affliction which is but for a moment. Thousands of the saints of God can testify to the reality of the sweetness of the Father's love experienced in the house of mourning. You thought to be desolated by your bereavement, you thought your skies would be for ever grey, and lo! you have found that notwithstanding your sharp anguish of spirit a great peace has settled down upon your soul, and the world unseen has come suddenly nearer, so much nearer that the noises of earth are hushed, and everything hard or unwelcome seems strangely small and insignificant in the light and love eternal. I say thousands have known that, and no doubt there are people listening to me now who have found it out just lately and been utterly taken by surprise thereat. Whereas you thought to be overwhelmed and shrouded in thick darkness, life to you is now clearer and fuller of meaning than ever, and God has done it all.

Live with God in prayer, and you will find the same thing happen all the way round. You will expect the best and get it, but you will not trouble much about externals. You will be thoroughly happy in doing the will of God from the heart, and

you will lose yourself in the glorious task. You will never be afraid of anything, and you will know that nothing material has any power to harm you or separate you from the source of all abiding joy. Take the very highest ground when you pray, and wait for God. He will not fail you.

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